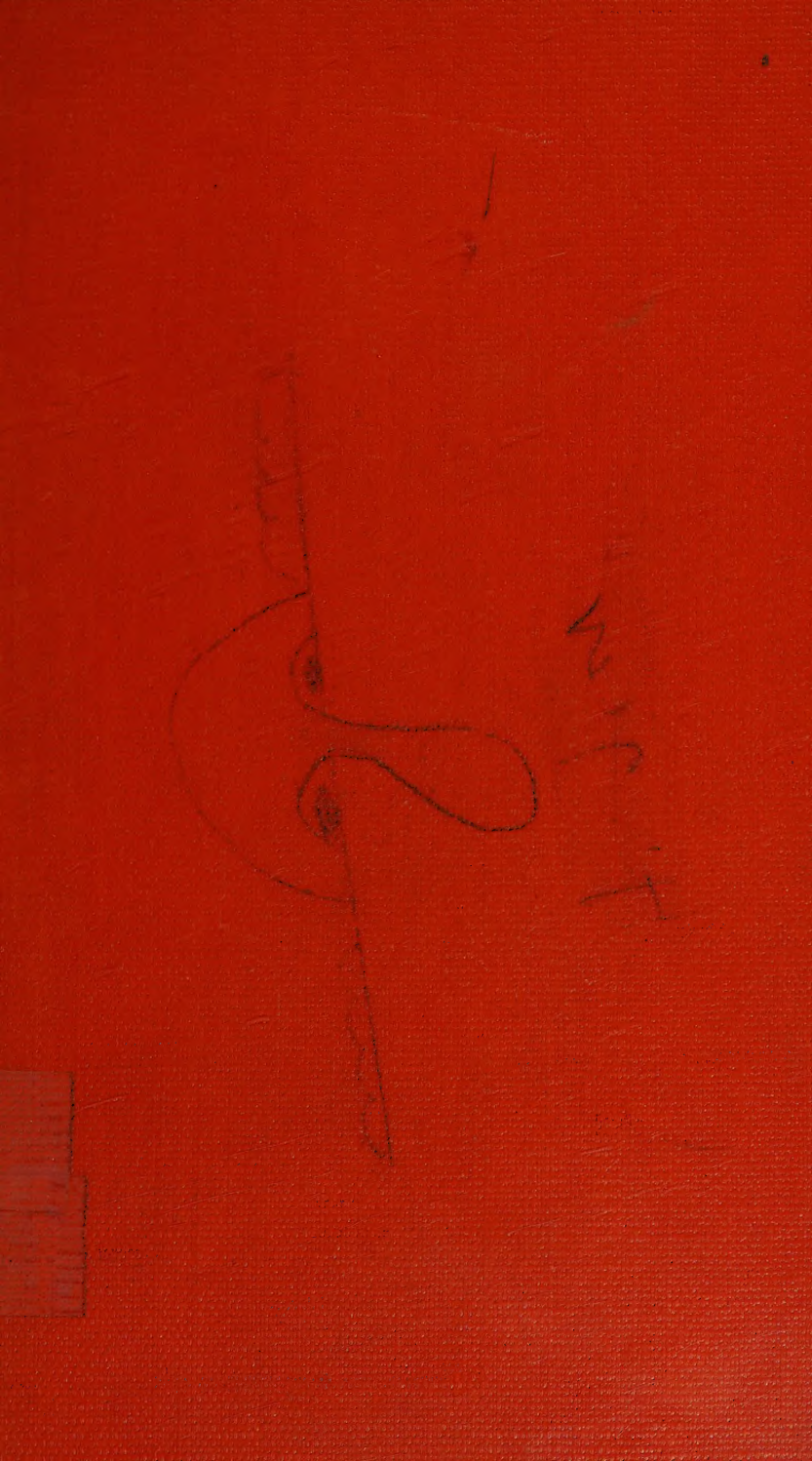

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THE SECOND EMPIRE

MASTERS AND MEN

PALMERSTON

A GALLERY

The Missing Muse

BY

Philip Guedalla

. . . light our pipes and talk about science and pearl diving and sciatica and Egypt and spelling and fish and trade winds and leather and gratitude and eagles, and a lot of subjects that we'd never had time to explain our sentiments about before.—O. HENRY

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TO
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BOOK

Conversation With a Caller

(*With apologies to Mabel, the Aubusson carpet, and Mr. George Moore*)

Myself (*reading*). 'A rich, warm night, at the beginning of August, when a gentleman enveloped in a cloak, for he was in evening dress, emerged from a club-house at the top of St. James's Street, and descended that celebrated eminence ——'

Front-Door Bell. Tinkle.

Myself (*continuing to read*). 'He had not proceeded more than half-way down the street ——'

Housemaid. Drat that bell. Yes, sir, he is at home. What name shall I say, sir?

Myself (*closing book*). Come in.

Housemaid. Mr. Nemo, sir.

Myself. Ah, my dear Nemo, you were never more welcome. I have been trying to compose a preface for a little book of essays, and I need to clear my mind. There is so much that might be said about the essay, and how can I say it better than to you? For there is nothing like a literary dialogue for uninterrupted monologue.

Nemo. Turgenev used to say ——

Myself. Besides, the preface is the most important part of the book. Even reviewers read a preface. I always do when I review. That is why reviewing novels is such torture, because a novel has no preface and you are driven to read the book instead. But, to return,

the essay is one of Nature's accidents, like wild-flowers and Mr. MacDonald's Cabinet. You may go on writing for years without knowing precisely what you are doing, and in the end you find that you have been writing essays. Practitioners of other arts are spared these little surprises. Painters do not wake up suddenly to a startled realisation that they have been painting frescoes all their lives.

NEMO. Manet once said to Monet ——

MYSELF. And few composers, one imagines, leap from the keyboard in a blinding flash of certainty that those little things of theirs must be fugues. But the lot of essayists is full of such shocks. You use your pen for half a dozen passing purposes—to catch a private mood, to tell an author what you think of him, to write down a pleasant scene before you forget it. And all the time, it seems, you have been writing essays. Those little lengths of prose will all be measured by some mysterious standard. Somebody will say that Lamb . . . and someone else will add that Lord Macaulay . . . Indeed, you will be extremely lucky if they consent to treat them as essays at all and do not angrily complain that, compared with your (or someone else's) major works, these little pieces somehow lack completeness. Of course they do. That is what they are for. But does not most criticism consist in complaining that things are not what they were never meant to be?

NEMO (*brightening a little at the question*). It was a favourite saying of Zola's at Médan ——

MYSELF. Nothing, though, was further from my intention

than to complain of critics. That would be far too reminiscent of the poor lost Marie Corelli. And that reminds me. I once omitted a little paper on her from a previous volume in the belief that she was too ephemeral. I was wrong, of course. For nothing, my dear Nemo, is too ephemeral for an essay. So I have tried to make amends by printing one on Mr. Arlen. Is he not *le Corelli de nos jours?* Pray do not answer. For nothing can be more provoking than to receive answers to rhetorical questions. It constantly gets public speakers into trouble. But I digress. We were talking (were we not?) about the essay. I always like to think of it as something wholly fortuitous—a little accident in prose. There are no rules for it. Even dramatic critics, who love to dismiss an evening's entertainment with the curt ejaculation, "But it is not a play," would be hard put to it to dismiss a piece of random prose by saying, "But it is not an essay." Provided always that it *is* just a piece of random prose. For it must not be a book in miniature, a standard work seen (as it were) through the wrong end of a telescope. One sometimes encounters an admirable composition which is a tiny treatise upon its subject, complete in each little limb and capable, at need, of expansion into a volume—any publisher, you feel, could do it with a bicycle pump, broad margins, and a few illustrations. Now that, whatever else it may be, is not an essay. For real essays do not grow up into books any more than telegraph boys into postmen or short stories into novels. They are

entirely separate organisms with distinct (and fully developed) qualities of their own.

NEMO (*cowed*). I quite agree.

MYSELF. And yet I shrink from the prevailing view that all essays should be written in the same mood. For you will agree as well that there is a singular uniformity of mood among their writers. Our essayists, delightful creatures, appear to specialise in graceful writing upon nothing in particular—On Doing Up Their Boots, On Cats Next Door, On Sneezing in the Train.

NEMO. I could think of others.

MYSELF. Pray do not trouble. These filmy themes are handled in practically every instance with an arch modesty, a shy obtrusion of their private characters, which is practically identical in every case and has come near to establishing a standard psychology for essayists. They all shamble forward on to the stage with a shy, too shy, grimace which serves to tell us that they are friendly, feeble creatures with a world of small human weaknesses and a whole host of minor (but strictly reputable) failings. They always seem to back into the limelight—just like Colonel Lawrence. All of them display a common hesitation, one engaging brand of candour, and the same little ecstasy of minor confessions. They tell us all about themselves with the identical coy nudge, until we almost begin to fear that essayist's elbow will become as epidemic as housemaid's knee.

NEMO. Quite so.

MYSELF. Ah, you are still there. It was Lamb's fault, of

course. Our essayists all seem to dress as Lamb for the costume ball of modern letters. And what is more trying to the taste than mutton dressed as Lamb? At any rate, I have no gift for gambols with our Lambkins. Besides, I dislike this tendency to confine essays to a single mood. I see them rather in the deathless classification of trains in *Mr. Punch's Bradshaw*—into trains that start, but do not arrive; trains that arrive, but do not start; and trains that merely run. Is not that the whole duty of essay-writing? If start they must from anywhere, then let them wander off into the *Ewigkeit*. If they arrive at a conclusion, they must have started from nowhere in particular. Or, lacking both starting-place and destination, they should merely run. (And, thanks to the exigencies of weekly journalism, so many of them appear to run on Saturdays only.) That random formula is the nearest that I would permit anyone to come to making laws for essay-writing. It is a glorious haphazard, in which a paper upon soap may end in economics or a statesman's life provide reflections upon postage-stamps. But it should beware like poison of studied triviality. I preach, my dear Nemo; and I have tried to practise too. Using prose for a pencil, I have sketched at random. Sometimes it was a point of view, sometimes a street-scene, and occasionally a note that seemed just worth recording of some remembered figure. Finality was never aimed at: rounded perfection is the last thing for which to go to essays. For essays, after all, are only studies casually detached from a prose-writer's sketch-book. But

graphic artists have frequently the impertinence to exhibit their studies. So why not authors? At any rate, I mean to. And that little flourish just rounds off my preface. Now you will take a cup of tea.

HOUSEMAID. You rang, sir?

MYSELF. Yes, bring tea for two; and you might turn on the light.

HOUSEMAID. But there is no one here, sir.

MYSELF. Never mind.

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The Missing Muse

THE MISSING MUSE

It is easy enuff, all but the writing. You just get it out of other books and write it down.—WILLIAM JAMES: Letter to Alexander James, May 3, 1900.

Ce délayage de pièces inédites en de lourds in-octavo que personne ne lit, qui figurent dans les bibliothèques au rayon des livres instructifs, des livres pour l'usage externe . . . agiter avant de s'en servir!—ALPHONSE DAUDET: L'Immortel.

Les sèches et rebutantes nomenclatures de faits appelées histoires. —BALZAC: Avant-Propos de La Comédie Humaine.

IT WAS tea time on Parnassus, and from the little hollow behind the round temple, where the Muses gather, came a buzz of conversation. Spoons tinkled (or was it softly shaken sistra?), as those accomplished ladies reclined with their accustomed grace after the labours of the day. Dulce, *as Euterpe always said,* est desipere in loco. *She always said so with her little giggle, and Melpomene frowned as usual. But then Melpomene was always frowning: someone said it was because those ridiculous buskins hurt her. Terpsichore unhooked her saxophone and vowed that she should die unless somebody gave her a cup of tea. Thalia ate bread and butter, looking more pastoral than ever. And Urania, a shade self-conscious after the eclipse, drank steadily and talked to no one.*

But Erato—"Three lumps, my dear!"—was talking to everyone at once; and Polyhymnia got involved in one of her dreadfully technical conversations with Euterpe about microphones and atmospherics—a man at KDKA, it seemed, had . . . Then Calliope startled them all by asking in her deepest voice, "Where's Clio?" And Echo, the little fool, answered, "Where's Clio?" There was no other answer. Clio, alas! was missing.

"Missing," to exchange Disraelian *pastiche* for the harsher idiom of the casualty lists, "missing, believed killed," might be her epitaph. For Clio, in spite of a gallant essay in her honour by Professor George Trevelyan, has vanished from the haunts of men—of English-speaking men, that is to say. For she left the Continent years ago after an unsuccessful attempt to learn German. The Muse of History, who once walked among us and leaned above bowed shoulders breathing style into learned pages and life into dead facts, has vanished; and while the incense steams on other altars and historians gash themselves before the Mumbo Jumbo of a vast card-index, the art of history has vanished with her. So we are left

in the draughty ruins of her temple, lamenting the sad state of something that was once a great branch of English letters.

The art of history is, perhaps, an awkward term to use, if by calling history an art we mean to deny its claim to be a science. For in a democratic age everything is a science, from the random anecdote of psycho-analysis to the uncorrelated data of economics. We are all, as Sir William Harcourt almost cried, scientists now. The tipster and the statistician, the thought-reader (now transferred from country fairs to Chairs of Psychology in universities) and his less articulate sister, the palmist, have each staked an indisputable claim to the dignity of scientists. The only pity is that most sciences are left in the hands of total illiterates.

But history, at least, must not be of their number. For though history is a full-fledged science in the narrow sense that its sole foundation must be a body of scientifically ascertained facts, it is also something more. Few satisfactory edifices consist of a foundation alone. The facts, however scientific, require to be presented; and in their presentation the historian is inevitably something more (or is it less?) than a scientist. Bare tabulation will not do;

simple enumeration is plainly insufficient. There must be a hint of perspective. The historian must select, and in the awkward process of selection he becomes an artist. One seems to see him at this uncomfortable stage desert the laboratory and furtively approach the studio. And why not? There is no need for him to blush when we detect him in the questionable company of artists. For history is an art as well —the art of representing past events through facts of scientific accuracy. If the facts are inaccurate, it is not history. But if they are not embodied in the picture of a living past, it is not history either. For a smear on a palette is not a picture. So the historian, when his work among the test-tubes of research is done, must turn artist, discarding his overalls for the velvet jacket. If he cannot, so much the less historian he.

It is so easy for the historian to forget his full duty in the multiplicity of his business. To put it crudely, he is asked to raise the dead, to bring the past to life, to give a continuous performance of the miracle of Endor. He must achieve this feat with a restricted armoury. For he is not allowed the novelist's liberty of invention. His incantations are strictly limited

to the ascertained facts, and with their aid alone he is expected to evoke the past. We ask of the historian a great tapestry, crowded with figures, filled with shifting lights and crowds and landscapes; and we insist sternly (though with perfect propriety) that he shall use no single thread for its weaving that cannot be vouched for as to its colour, length, and weight by reference to his unvarying authorities, the scientific facts.

Can it be wondered at that some, more nervous than their colleagues, prefer the humbler office of spinning thread to the arduous weaving of the great tapestry? One may respect their caution. For thread must be spun and dyed before it takes its place in the woven picture. But their work at the spindles and the dye-vat, however valuable, is a mere preliminary to the great weaving which is the full duty of a historian. Others may hand him threads (though the wise man will spin his own—will do, that is to say, his own research in the dust-heaps of material where Carlyle choked and Macaulay shouldered his indomitable way). But the true historian, who aspires to be anything more than a mere assistant, will weave his own tapestry, paint his picture, and

raise (if he can) the ghosts, the moving, speaking ghosts, of the past.

One turns a little sadly from his lofty function to the general performance of it in our own time. Our need of history is not less great than our grandfathers' was. Most modern problems have somewhere in the past a counterpart in miniature; most statesmen might be spared an error or so by a mild knowledge of the rocks on which their predecessors split. Peace-treaties would be no worse for a little information on the subject of earlier peace-treaties. For the world (it sounds almost academic to say so) did not begin in 1918; and its history opens the sole road to wisdom. Tried statesmen may have, at the most, forty years of political experience; but the historian, who has worked with Richelieu and failed with Metternich, has three hundred. So a grasp of history may provide vicarious political experience, may by a sort of magic make its votaries two centuries old at second-hand. Yet we almost seem to discourage the weavers of these instructive tapestries. Indeed, we hint sometimes that they have no business to know how to weave, that the true historian should stick to his threads.

But if history is to be written, historians must

know how to write it. A school of painters, who announced themselves as competent in the chemistry of pigments but boasted that they, thank heaven! were wholly uncontaminated by the meretricious art of drawing, would excite derision. But a school of historians making precisely similar claims is treated with profound respect. For we demand research, a knowledge of materials, a habit of scrupulous investigation, and a meticulous balancing of authorities. But if the precious results of these arduous exercises are presented with a suspicion of literary skill, our eyebrows begin to rise. What business, we enquire, has the historian to know how to write? This dangerous accomplishment should be confined to men of letters; and the historian, if signs of it appear in his work, must be a "literary" historian. The historians of our day work in the shadow of that dreaded imputation; and, once a branch of English letters, history has become a form of manual labour, comparable to card-indexing or the assembling of inexpensive automobiles. Clio, alas! is missing, and Mr. Ford reigns in her place.

Yet the historian who would discharge his duty to society, *must* write—or nobody will read him. Gibbon wrote; so did Macaulay. Even a

committee of the American Historical Association on the Writing of History seemed to prefer it to be written. Professor Abbott, of Harvard, positively urged that "while one may admit that in its method history should and must be scientific, this need not and ought not prevent its being literary on the side of presentation." Is this the dawn? We sit in darkness, under the almost Papal prohibition of "writing" fulminated by the late Lord Acton. But the lay public, hungry sheep, look up and are not fed. We may be sure that if they look long enough, someone will feed them. Their gesture (if a mute look may be so described) is not surprising. For there dwells behind those patient eyes some memory of a distant age when things were very different. The oldest among them can recall a time when history was not only "written," but was positively read. It is not so long—perhaps a trifle over fifty years—since every house in England which contained books at all held history books; since public men could avow quite unashamed a knowledge of history without incurring the invariably fatal suspicion of being professors astray in politics; since historians ranked as high as, and even higher than, novelists in their countrymen's esteem; since

Clio, in fact, walked openly among us—*et vera incessu patuit dea.*

In that age Mr. Gibbon had faced twenty years of single-handed work among the authorities on a vast theme. No bright young graduates conducted his research for him; no syndicate of banded historians he; no *Lausanne Ancient History* his work. Stranger still, he "wrote" quite shamelessly, and in a manner which positively compels the admiration of Mr. Arnold Bennett, stern judge of all his predecessors. Strangest of all, he released the full play of his wit, jesting in his great rolling sentences filled with Latin derivatives, his face (as a comedian's should be) invariably solemn and his literary manner suggestive of some titanic comic opera couched in oratorio and fugue. No nervousness of wit in Mr. Gibbon. It played like lightning over the dark landscape of his enormous theme—sometimes the thunder rolled, but far more often in his text the lightning flickered. For wit was not excluded from his text. His nervous heirs retire, when their infrequent jokes occur to them, to giggle in a foot-note. But Mr. Gibbon did not disdain the elegant tehee right in the centre of his page. Perhaps the unfed sheep of the lay reading

public recall a little hungrily the age when historians did not forbear to joke.

But the change lies deeper still. More vital qualities than wit are stunted in the modern historian's development, infants of richer promise flung to the wolves of Göttingen. Once, just ninety years ago, an historian of the most solemn purpose could avow that he meant "to splash down" what he knew of the French Terror "in large masses of colour that it may look like a smoke and flame conflagration in the distance." How strangely his confession reads to a generation whose average impression of any complex historical event, if it has learnt its lessons, is that it looked like an accident to a card-index. And yet the smoke, the hungry flame, the cries were not, one feels, wholly unlike the Terror. For Carlyle applied his imagination to the facts—an historian's imagination, which assembles scientific facts into a visible picture and is totally distinct from the pure invention of the novelist. "Imagination," as Sir John Fortescue once informed a startled audience of historians, "must not be construed as synonymous with invention. . . . It is rather *re*-creative and *re*-productive. It is the power of bringing back to the mind the impression that

objects might give or have given. Obviously, therefore, the historian, whose business it is to re-create or interpret the past, must rely upon the only medium that is capable of producing that effect—imagination primarily, and not the generalising intellect. Imagination is, therefore, not only invaluable, but essential to the historian." Once more, is it the dawn? And do we hang upon the verge of an admission that the historian's duty is not merely to catalogue dry bones in a museum, but to make them live? If so, how very few of them achieve it.

The field of history is, at the present time, a singularly depressing landscape. One almost sees it as a cheerless little garden, in which the biting north-easter out of Germany permits none but the hardiest flowers to bloom. Here Professor Trevelyan rears his gallant head; there a shy blossom or so grows on the stony soil which Acton sprinkled liberally with the rocks of syndication. Indeed, the plants in poor Clio's border are mainly rock plants; and we should deal tenderly with these shy apologies for flowers. How small they are; how easily discouraged; how chilled, when Croce damps them with the vast watering-can of his *Theory and History of Historiography;* how scared, when Dr.

Gooch stoops in his *History and Historians in the Nineteenth Century* to administer a pinch of weed-killer to a small bloom that thought it was a flower. Small wonder that the Muse is rarely seen walking in her garden.

What are the causes? Primarily, one feels, the chill north-easter. It is still blowing hard across the North Sea (and even across the Atlantic) from the German flats. For British scholarship has worn the *Pickelhaube* for almost half a century now; and in America, where Germany has always been the supreme finishing-school, the influence is still more undoubted. No chauvinist would seek for an instant to deny the magnitude of the Anglo-American debt to German methods and inspiration. But, vastly the gainers by it, are we not also losers? The conquest of our historical schools was almost too complete, the peace-treaty so manifestly one-sided; and it is time, perhaps, for the wise adjustments of an historical Locarno. For whilst it was good for historians to be sent to the documents, was it altogether good for the documents to be presented in undigested masses, without perspective and in the unsound belief, attributed by one malicious critic to a too scientific rival, that "all

facts are born free and equal"? It is time to recall that the document is a means, and not an end; that the researcher's thread must find its place one day in the historian's tapestry; that brickmakers are well enough, but that the edifice of history calls for an architect as well —an architect who, as Professor Trevelyan has written, "must quarry his own stones, and build with his own hands." The task is frightening. Small wonder that the weaker brethren prefer to pass a lifetime in the quarries. The risks are fewer, and the rewards of steady manual labour are respectable. But still the work is waiting. "Life is short, art is long, but history is longest, for it is art added to scholarship. . . . The double task, hard as it is, we little people must shoulder as best we may, in the temporary absence of giants."

How, with this breezy encouragement from Professor Trevelyan, is it to be attempted? There is no golden rule, though historians were once inclined to seek one in the historical testament of the late Lord Acton, scanning it as minutely as Russian statesmen used to study the will of Peter the Great for indications of a continuous line of foreign policy. But that most erudite of spectres, after debauching the schol-

arship of one great university with a Saturnalia of syndication, seems almost to be recognised as a will-o'-the-wisp; and one may turn away with a sad memory of Matthew Arnold—

> But so many books thou readest,
> But so many schemes thou breedest,
> But so many wishes feedest,
> That my poor head almost turns.

Not this way lies, we feel, the road to a revival of the lost art of history. That, perhaps, is only to be found in a return to the historian's true business. He is, when all is said, one cell in the world's memory of itself; he, too, like the lamented Proust, rides off *à la recherche du temps perdu*. And if the quest is to succeed, he must reconstruct the past, set old breezes stirring once again, and—most elusive miracle of all—bring the dead back to life. His business is to write about dead men; but if he is to do his duty, he should remember that they were not always dead. For he is not concerned to embalm them, but to resurrect, to set them moving, catch the tone of their voices, tilt of their heads, and posture of the once living man.

That he can never do, if he writes of them in a museum tone as though they were items in

some immutable catalogue of Time's collections. He must project himself unsparingly into the past, evoke it with significant detail, charm it back to life—and forswear for ever that memorial tone which pronounces endless funeral orations in historian's English above the closed coffin of the past. The past should, for the historian, be his present. He must never write from the angle of to-day, but almost always from the angle of contemporaries with the events that he describes—seeing Waterloo, as Professor Trevelyan urged him, "not as we see it now, with all its time-honoured associations and its conventionalised place in history, but as our ancestors saw it first, when they did not know whether the 'Hundred Days,' as we now call them, would not stretch out for a Hundred Years." The rule seems obvious enough. Yet how much historical writing flies straight in its face, denying sense and baffling imagination by recourse to the inverted method admirably travestied by M. Maurois' inimitable historical dramatist— *À la vérité fort bien, disait Duguesclin à ses hommes d'armes . . . à la vérité fort bien, nous autres, hommes du Moyen Âge, ne devons pas oublier que nous partons demain pour la Guerre de Cent Ans.*

Here is wrong narrative method encased in a single grotesque nut-shell. For we want to be told what happened, not what was going to happen in a few years' time. The most exasperating passages in any historical work are those in which the author exploits his unfair advantage of having been born a century later. We all recall the exasperating gambit—"He little knew that his policy was doomed to futility by . . ." or "Strangely unaware of the inevitable march of events, he . . ." The march of events is rarely inevitable, although historians have an awkward way of seizing on the particular accident that chanced to happen and enthroning it in a blaze of platitudes as the Inevitable. But their real duty is just to tell us how it happened.

So the historian (murder will out at last) must tell a story. Taking his courage in both hands, he must defy Seeley's injunction to "break the drowsy spell of narrative." His narrative may conduce, as Seeley ascetically feared, to sleep—to sleep, perchance to dream . . . But when his reader is set dreaming of the past, the historian has done his work, if only the dream be true. For then *temps perdu* has become *temps retrouvé*, and the quest is ended.

But the teacups tinkle on the shady side of Parnassus. The Nine are still, whichever end you begin to count from, only Eight. A deep voice (it must be Calliope again—she is always so fond of repetition) enquires once more: "Where's Clio?" And Echo, the little stupid, answers, "Where?"

EDWARDIAN NOCTURNE

WHISPERING (as usual) from her towers the last enchantments of the Middle Age, Cambridge—for it was Cambridge this time—spread her accustomed gardens to the moonlight. At least, I think she did. But, speaking for myself, I was indoors. Where else should one seek the delightful inmates of England's second home of lost causes, or hope to find the forsaken beliefs and unpopular names and impossible loyalties? Such exquisite things do not haunt damp gardens on cold winter evenings. But they were undoubtedly present in the little theatre up two flights of stairs. Perhaps Mr. Matthew Arnold, a delighted wraith, counted them over again above our heads, and was back in heaven (since college discipline must be maintained even in the Hereafter) by midnight. For all of them were there. The impossible loyalties became possible again, the forsaken beliefs found true believers, and the lost causes were triumphantly pleaded on the little stage. Was not the A.D.C. whispering

from her footlights the last enchantments of the Edwardian Age?

It was, since we were out of London, a delectable *première*, a first night without first-nighters. No "resting" actress waded along the stalls and, hungry for recognition, showed to the dress-circle a too familiar profile. No public man became more public still in conversation across three rows of seats. Greatest boon of all, no dramatic critic obtruded the shabby uniform which that sad guild shares with conjurers and waiters. But it was, for all that, a first night. We were to see a new play by a new dramatist; and we listened hard. The programme took us straight back to the age of Mr. Balfour. Was not the scene laid in "*Briony Manor Breakfast Room*," and "*Briony Manor Hall: Next Evening*," and "*Briony Manor Breakfast Room: Next Morning*"? How could one doubt, in such surroundings, that the Liberals were still in office (in spite of several powerful speeches by Lord Cromer) and that King Edward was hovering, dove-like, over the map of Europe on one of those wonderful journeys of his? At moments one could almost catch the faint click of distant hansoms.

The sweet illusion lasted. For on the stage we saw once again the imperishable country house of British drama, one of the stately homes of Sir Arthur Pinero and Mr. Henry Arthur Jones, where wives were suspected upon the most inadequate grounds and missing jewels were apt to be recovered just before the end of Act III. Only this time it had been lent for a few days to some friends of "Saki," those sprightly phantoms who always seem far too stupid to conduct their author's brilliant conversation. What could be more exquisitely Edwardian than "Saki"? How infinitely far that spiteful worldliness is from the clean-limbed romps of Mr. A. A. Milne and Mr. Ian Hay and all the other "Diversions of this Sweeter, Simpler Reign." It is not, one feels, for nothing that the Club prints on its programmes the name of a royal Patron. For the little comedy was a "period" piece of rare perfection; and it was a graceful act to produce it on Queen Alexandra's eightieth birthday. Arrangements should be made through the usual channels for the customary distribution of diamond scarf-pins (with royal cipher) and of gold and diamond sleeve-links (with the initials E. and A.).

The author of *The Watched Pot* perished, alas! with his period in the war. But it is almost a pious duty to commemorate (preferably upon the green paper, for which so much of it was written) the incomparably elegant prose of H. H. Munro. One can still remember the sudden, discourteous grab for the *Westminster*, which used to follow the discovery that there was a new "Saki"; the sharp turn of his wrist, which projected the reader into one of those drawing-rooms where incredibly stupid people were made to say still more incredibly clever things; the dazed enjoyment of his perfect verbal felicities; and the hopeless envy with which one followed those detestable young men of his through their glorious round of indolence, epigram, and perfect tailoring. Perhaps it seems a little easier to do than in those days it used to seem. But then "Saki" is no longer doing it. Some fool with a German rifle at Beaumont Hamel saw to that.

His work must always have the irresistible attraction of anything that is highly finished. Dr. Johnson might object that the highest genius does not "carve heads upon cherry-stones." But one doubts, somehow, whether

Clovis and *Comus Bassington* were really designed for Dr. Johnson. Those elaborate young gentlemen, about whom even their artificiality was conscientiously artificial, must not be judged by these brutal standards. They would be the last to expect it. For they seem to realise that they were just instruments for the convenient interchange of their author's wit; and that, if one has any taste for wit, is a sufficient justification for their rather aimless existence.

He expressed it (as wit should always be expressed) with grave elaboration. Like the true masters of that craft, he is rarely guilty of an *impromptu*. But he worked it into the sudden cadences of a delightful style. The surface of his prose is *dur et poli*, as Voltaire said of a friend and his marble table. But beneath its hard, bright surface one caught strange gleams of an odd taste for melodrama and the sudden glint of his incomparable wit.

One expects the wit—the cook who "was a good cook, as cooks go, and as cooks go she went," or the young man who "sat in a corner of the Princess's salon and tried to forgive the furniture, which started out with the pious intention of being Louis XV and relapsed at fre-

quent intervals to Wilhelm II." But the melodrama, in the midst of these verbal elegances, always affected one with an unpleasant surprise. One did not expect the howl of real wolves to interrupt the conversation in *Wolves of Cernogratz*. And it was a serious *inconvenance* on the part of the poor lady in *The Reticence of Lady Ann* to sit dead in her own drawing-room. Such intrusions of reality had almost the offensiveness of a real actress in charades. One resents it. And, equally unreal, his one comedy was an orderly riot of genteel flippancy, expressed with "Saki's" invariable neatness and presented in that decorous setting of the brilliant, the incredible, country house which so becomes it. Like *Bassington*, it "has no moral: if it points out an evil, at any rate it suggests no remedy." It is good reading; and for those audiences which are still sufficiently light-minded to prefer amusement to instruction, it is good hearing also.

So we bathed, for three Acts, in the pleasant streams by which King Edward sat and Mr. Alfred Austin sang. We delightedly knew, as we heard each perfect epigram, that we had heard something like it before. For we were

recovering a lost time with greater eagerness than *Swann* himself; and for a whole evening we were allowed to breathe the slightly scented air of a vanished age. No wonder that the night struck a little cold, as we trooped out into the darkness and rejoined, with faint regret, our contemporaries. After this Edwardian interlude Mr. T. S. Eliot seemed a trifle jagged, the impropriety of Mr. Aldous Huxley somehow lacked conviction, and there was about the new revelation of Mr. Joyce something almost malodorous. One thanks the A.D.C. for so correcting our perspective.

But was it ungrateful to sit so comfortably in Cambridge and think of Oxford? I had come all the way from London, and memory was haunted by another evening, when another company of bold young men was to play Aristophanes in the decent obscurity of a learned language. It knew its lines; it knew its cues; it knew the music. But suddenly the grim announcement fell from a clear sky that Mr. Max Beerbohm, dramatic critic to the *Saturday Review*, had come all the way from London, too, and was "in front" (how bravely technical we were). The company was chilled; the actors

paled beneath their paint; knees, always so visible in classical productions, knocked together. For Mr. Beerbohm lived in town, wrote books, and (yet more unnatural) had fabulously survived by fifteen years his undergraduate career. That happened fifteen years ago.

THE MANDARIN

ONE seems to see him nodding still—bland, imperturbable, and omniscient—the very image of a china Mandarin. Even his exterior had something of the perfect smoothness of fine porcelain. The little figure, which stands in our affectionate remembrance, was so rounded, so complete. One sees it still, sailing sedately round a corner in Westminster at a familiar angle, or presiding somewhere like a mild, domestic Buddha and stirring a little in the chair to flute his insinuating wisdom. Mandarin, besides, in the wide range of his attainments. One feels that Haldane was the perfect type of public man that we should get, if high office were awarded by a judicious system of competitive examination. Other Chancellors have ranged as widely. Brougham talked about everything; and does not Lord Birkenhead write about everything? But Haldane differed from them in knowing everything—Hegelian metaphysics, equity, the art of war, electricity, higher mathematics, chemistry, and education. He

knew about them all; and, better still, he knew that he knew about them.

This happy certainty runs, like a Wagnerian *leit-motiv*, through his beautifully told autobiography. No biographer could have touched it in half so delicately. The portrait, like himself, is perfectly complete, from the young barrister in Bayswater with eyes demurely fixed upon the Woolsack to the encyclopædic veteran indicating to Mr. Ramsay MacDonald that a suitable colleague might be found to preside in the Committee of Imperial Defence, remodel education (but not—oh not—from the Board of Education), and transform the higher regions of the judicature. Who but Haldane could ever fill that variegated bill? Yet his career had qualified him for the multiple attempt. The law came naturally from his professional career; though in law, perhaps, his achievement was more open to question than in his other fields, since lawyers have been heard to hint that his philosophic mind would sometimes leave the edges of a problem just a little blurred. Philosophy, one feels, impedes the perfect lawyer; and perhaps, in Haldane's case, Göttingen was the enemy of Lincoln's Inn.

The most surprising item in his repertory was

warfare. He had not learned that in Germany; for the Germany of his affections and early training (which sent him home to a startled family with long hair, a fierce moustache, and an emaciated frame) was the mild-eyed Germany of *Lieder*, wood-carving, and metaphysics rather than the stiffer, clanking Germany that said its nightly prayers to Bismarck, Roon, and Moltke. War came to him by an odd chain of accidents. The story is fully told in his volume and is, perhaps, the only touch of "revelations" in the book. The trinity of Liberal Imperialism—Asquith, Grey, and Haldane—met in the summer of 1905 to prepare their terms of entry into a Liberal Government. Sir Henry Campbell-Bannerman was to be tolerated as Prime Minister on condition of going to the House of Lords, whilst Asquith led the Commons as Chancellor of the Exchequer, Grey had the Foreign Office, and Haldane the Woolsack. By a slightly dubious manœuvre King Edward was informed of their compact (Lord Knollys suggesting mildly that C.-B. might be permitted to retain his seat for six months or so). One wonders just how much attention that sagacious monarch paid to this unsolicited information as to the personal proj-

ects of his discontented thanes. It is fairly evident from the result that, when the time came, he put no pressure on Campbell-Bannerman. For in the first stage of his Cabinet-making, Asquith was taken in alone—and not as Leader in the Commons. One thane was thus disposed of. Where was the triple pact? It is impossible to believe that Asquith was capable of crude desertion; and one is left with a haunting sense that the pact itself was, perhaps, less rigid than it had seemed to Haldane's busy fancy. Meanwhile, the Cabinet was in formation, and he struggled with his doubts. A bland Prime Minister offered the odious alternatives of a post as Law Officer or the Home Office. He would have liked the Colonies; but they were gone. There was a night of doubt. He thought hard of Grey, the King, and Free Trade—and took the War Office.

Thus, by a lucky accident, the British Army got its ablest reformer since Cardwell. He learned it like a brief. Happily, many of the books were in the German language; and he mastered his subject to the satisfaction of every expert, until the soldiers learned to love him, and to forgive the occasional oddity that showed itself in his remark that his ambition was to

have "a Hegelian army." Hegelian or not, it moved. It moved silently to France; and he had his reward when a victorious Field-Marshal knocked at a silent door in Queen Anne's Gate to thank "the greatest Secretary of State for War England has ever had."

The next chapter had a less happy ending. For his drift to Labour was slightly unaccountable in its inception and unsatisfying in results. His party affiliations had never been strong. In the last days of Mr. Balfour's Government he was in happier relations with the enemy than with many of his friends in Opposition; and he was ill-fitted for the rough weather that awaited Liberals between the Armistice and 1924. For Haldane was a first-rate administrator; and administrators are rarely happy in Opposition. When Labour came near office, he was "not troubled by capital levy or by any mere ripple on the surface" (Göttingen, one feels, had been a shade remiss about his economics). He found himself attracted to "the underlying ideal of the Labour Movement," and took the plunge. Besides, was there not education to be thought of? Yet it ended in a rueful admission: "Stir up my colleagues to a large policy about Education I could not. Nor did I succeed in

truth much better with the Labour Cabinet when it came into office in 1924." Labour (the tendency persists) was always shy of education.

That story was unfinished; and when Labour returned to place, he was not there to see. But the tale of Haldane's life stands exquisitely complete. It seems to flow like a full and silent river past a perfect home (with just one window shuttered for the private tragedy, so touchingly narrated), past innumerable fields of happy work, into the sea. Like his last book, he was complete himself, with just a touch of that rigidity which lies in a glass case at Göttingen with the impressive label: *Petrefactum nomine Haldane.* And the clear memory remains of a benignant figure nodding from its niche—compact and kindly, *totus teres atque rotundus*—the perfect Mandarin.

IN THE KEY OF YELLOW

HOW far away it seems. Beyond the Pyramids. Perhaps the past can never be recovered. But what past is more irrecoverable than the distant age, when the young lions of the *Yellow Book* alarmed the Albany by roaring at the Bodley Head? The old names wake strange echoes. How far away it seems, though, when the affrighted traffic used to pause in Vigo Street. Policemen in Burlington Gardens saw visions; drivers of hansom cabs in Sackville Street dreamed dreams; *Punch* broke into angry parody; and Mr. Joseph Chamberlain, turning in disquiet from modern letters, plunged into the intrigues which ended in the Jameson Raid. Beyond the Pyramids, and further.

How to evoke them from the shades? The charm is "*Fin de siècle.*" Murmur it softly to yourself, and soon they come—a mist of shadowy young men with longish hair and shortish poems. The names have almost faded. Fainter than Beowulf, one catches the once modish syllables—Dowson (printer, be careful: it was once familiar), Crackanthorpe, Mar-

zials, Davidson, Wratislaw, Le Gallienne. Lie lightly on them, dust; for lying lightly was their *forte*.

They do not greatly matter. That, perhaps, is why it is a friendly act to recall them. One might ask the Witch of Endor to raise Goethe or Dr. Johnson for a *mauvais quart d'heure*. But for a pleasant witches' supper give me the faded reputations of the Nineties. They have a disarming consciousness of achievement, which reminds us of ourselves. It somehow resembles a noise of distant Sitwells. Some of them were not deceived about their own achievement. Not many, perhaps. But two at least—a high percentage for any group. Which of our own could claim as many?

A shy, elaborately shy beginner from Merton discovered (and is still discovering) new variations on familiar themes of line and colour, with a strange ground-bass of comment in a tiny handwriting. He handled prose as well with the same easy wrist that used to swing his lines round the luxuriant contours of King George IV and his great-nephew. Beside him, if one may believe the evidence, there worked a second figure, where a hatchet-faced young man plied a faultless pencil for the portrayal

of pierrots, Roman empresses, Augustan beaux, Herodias, most un-Tennysonian Knights of the Round Table, Tannhäuser, and the whole litter of an overstocked imagination. His work, in two white volumes, is the strange mirror of his pilgrimage from Malory to Ben Jonson. It remains an influence on black-and-white and one of the few tastes which undergraduates do not shed in later life. Pious research has even added a third white slab to his monument. Perhaps it is a trifle hollow. Much of it revives dead schoolboy jokes. But one or two deserved resuscitation. How delightful to be so solemn about these scraps. This is the true spirit of Egyptology, which preserves preposterous fragments on solemn pedestals in air-tight cases. That was the fate of Egypt, whose broken combs lie in state at Bloomsbury. The fate is exquisitely appropriate to the lost darling of the *Yellow Book*. How far away it seems. Beyond the Pyramids. . . .

SIXTY YEARS A PRINCE

IT IS never easy to evoke a whole age with a single phrase. But few charms have greater power to call up a lost world than to murmur "H.R.H." Murmur the letters slowly; and slowly it comes, the age of the hansom cab. There is a distant rumble of horse omnibuses, a faint echo of the Manola Waltz; forgotten cues bring on Miss Nellie Farren; the mashers stroll in Rotten Row; and, gowned to distraction, the professional beauties sway slowly by. Mr. Irving is playing at the Lyceum, Mr. Gladstone at Westminster. Mr. Leighton is painting his draperies, Mr. Millais his little girls; and Mr. Carlyle is growling in his corner. The Queen and Mr. Tennyson are both in the Isle of Wight, his heart in Camelot and hers in the Highlands. The Comédie Française exhibits its attenuated Bernhardt, who sleeps—*mirabile dictu*—in a coffin; Fred Archer urges racehorses, no less attenuated, to equestrian miracles; and the Jersey Lily droops magnificently on her stalk. A lost London slowly stirs to life on the faint spirals of a single cigar held

in a royal hand, which raised innumerable hats with curly brims and signed (a little stiffly), "Albert Edward."

That figure, which smiles perpetually over a white shirt-front or recedes into the green perspective of unnumbered paddocks, stands for a period, as his mother's little silhouette had stood for the Victorian. In one view the Edwardian age, which lasted until his death, began about 1880. For those thirty years he was central to their social history and intelligently interested in their politics. Assiduous on their race-courses, he studied their drama. Nothing, perhaps, except their literature was alien to him. Before 1880 he had enjoyed a protracted adolescence of nearly forty years, in which his parents, indomitably parental, trained him hard for those responsibilities, which they persistently refused to let him assume. For that early period the simple narrative methods of Sir Sidney Lee are almost adequate. We miss, perhaps, the pitying smile which we have almost grown to look for in biographers of royal persons; since Sir Sidney is rarely guilty of irony. But his embittered picture of the relentless march of the Prince Consort's educational ideals across his prostrate son is fair and vivid.

It is only when he reaches the upper strata of the Edwardian that he seems to grow inadequate. "I intended," sang Mr. Austin Dobson, "an ode; and it turned to a sonnet." His subsequent embarrassment drove him, if I remember, to take refuge in a triolet. One cannot turn from the eight hundred pages, in which Sir Sidney Lee accompanies his late sovereign from the cradle to the throne, without a saddened conviction that he intended a Life; but it turned to an obituary. He makes, alas! no escape into a shapelier form of art.

Year after year (there are sixty of them to a single volume) the relentless tribute proceeds, with its patient enumeration of foundation stones laid, learned societies placed under the obligation of a royal speech, and golden opinions won. We are told in half a page how the Society of Arts offered its Presidency, gave it instead to "an octogenarian member of the society, Mr. William Tooke, the economist," renewed the offer, and elicited from the Prince in a mood of paradox "the hope that he might 'promote the great and beneficent objects which my father had so much at heart.' " A later page informs us, on the indisputable evidence of an eyewitness, that the Prince, whilst serving upon

a Royal Commission, "drew with a pencil on a piece of paper for a considerable part of the time. He drew Union Jacks, and he had two pencils, a red and a blue, besides his black one, which lay beside him always." These courtly trivialities appear in an endless procession of public virtues, which walks judiciously round all awkward corners. One day, perhaps, we shall have King Edward's letters. Then some more pointed pen may write a shorter book. But until then we shall turn gratefully to Sir Sidney as to a quarry. For the marble is there—the true Carrara from which Albert Memorials are hewn—and in Sir Sidney Lee, King Edward found his Sir Theodore Martin.

THE EXPERTS

WE LIVE in an age that is full of odd inversions. Fifteen years ago, in the hot summer weeks before the world slid easily over the smooth edge of the cataract into disaster, we listened with grave respect to the measured utterances of experts (so few, but oh! so wise) on foreign affairs. They were a little knowing in those days about Albania, where a persevering German gentleman struggled interminably with an ungovernable people and an unpronounceable title. (Cannot one, even now, recover the lost innocence of the world before the War by murmuring "Mpret"?) They estimated, with a wealth of *expertise*, the repercussions upon French politics of an act of hysteria and violence by the wife of a statesman recently reinstated as one of the godfathers (all too numerous) of the new Europe (still far too new). And with the strange, the unanimous concentration of experts upon topics that do not matter they said practically nothing whatever, in those hot weeks, about Germany. But, then, had they not ingeminated for years in the stony

ear of an indifferent world that there would be trouble when the snow melted in the Balkans? It was the master phrase of the old-world expert on foreign affairs. Four and thirty times since the Treaty of Berlin he had foretold disaster "when the snow melts in the Balkans." Almost mechanically he foretold it for the thirty-fifth, as the snow-water swept down the streams towards the Ægean and the Adriatic in the early sunshine of 1914. And at last (it is such happy chances that reconcile the expert to his dismal lot) he was right: the snow melted, and there *was* trouble in the Balkans.

Foreign affairs in that happy time were the chosen playground of the expert. One hardly ventured to express a view upon them, unless one was the repository of some secret—of a tradition, it might be, of the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, or the correct pronunciation of a port that someone coveted in Tripoli or Dalmatia. The mere layman was confined to home politics. It was his humbler lot to speculate upon the working of a new Insurance Act, to thrill with the rhetoric of an infant Land Campaign, to watch with round, startled eyes the treasonable parlour games with which Sir Edward Carson enlivened the blameless exist-

ences of loyal Tories. Home politics were left to the first-comer. But the complexities of foreign affairs were felt to be an expert's business.

A neat inversion has now reversed the *rôles*. Foreign politics have become, in our time, the layman's paradise. Good intentions and a general taste for peace are accepted as a substitute for knowledge. Any nice-minded gentleman (or lady), who believes that the world began with the Covenant of the League of Nations, is permitted to tell us what to do about it. He has only to master a few trifling facts of elementary orthography, to mind his p's (in Przemysl) and his q's (in Iraq). Where once the old-world expert lectured us about the secret cravings of the Ballplatz and the Wilhelmstrasse, we sit entranced by the purer prattlings of the maiden lady who has once been to Geneva.

And how impressively transformed, to match, is the face of home politics. Once the playground of the amateur, it has been walled in, wired off, and staked out by the experts. To revisit it is almost like stumbling on a garden once cheerful with the laughter, the happy flukes, the loud, uncertain scoring of human tennis-players, and finding there instead the hard-faced precision of those international

athletes who have destroyed a game and left us in its place a mere news-item for the late editions. For domestic affairs have become the solemn arena for a new breed of experts, whose "curves" and "cycles" have taken the place of argument. Gravely enthroned, they tell us all about it; and where once the amateur diplomats chastised us with whips, the economists chastise us with Keynes. They predict, with terrifying exactitude, the unpredictable. They weigh in new scales, which take our inexpert breath away, the imponderable. The economist has quite supplanted the amateur diplomatist; and the Trade Cycle revolves where once the snow was always so ominously melting in the Balkans. But as we listen to the new omniscients, we cannot, somehow, quite forget the old.

NÖEL, NÖEL . . .

I BEGIN to feel quite concerned about the future. This, let me add, is not a Warning Voice on population. Population will probably look after itself—that is to say, so long as it can get other people to pay for looking after it. But I digress.

The future that begins to loom a trifle darkly for me is the more distant future (which grammarians exquisitely term the Future Perfect), when men like—or, perhaps, not quite like—gods will patiently reconstruct our civilisation from its scanty remains. Baulked by the instability of our bridges, the New Zealander will find no ruined arch to stand on. Thames may be there, but very little else; and in the almost total absence of bridges, Dome, and steeples, appropriate reflections will not be easy. For our cities, like the Cities of the Plain, will have vanished under a pool of liquid cement, except where faint traces of a grouting-plant indicate that somewhere near a race of men once loved and hoped.

We shall leave so little behind us that is

indestructible; and one feels sadly that much of ourselves will inevitably be missed in the efforts, however painstaking, of the archæologists who will seek to reconstruct our lives from large accumulations of gramophone needles and safety-razor blades. Remains (or perhaps it will not) the printed page. A hopeful view suggests that our paper is quite as perishable as the opinions which we put on it. If so, the grounds of my anxiety disappear, and the misunderstanding which I dread will not arise. For assuming, to look for a moment on the brighter side, that the things we write will perish with us, our honour as an age is comparatively safe. I am prepared to face posterity on my razor blades.

But this question of survival is a precarious business. Are we quite safe in reckoning on the destructibility of rag-paper and printer's ink? May not some interfering scientist officiously spray the page with preservatives? It is an awkward speculation, which leaves me uneasy still. Other ages may have deluded themselves with the same dream of safe oblivion. Hammurabi was, in all probability, modest about his Code and hoped that Time would hush it up. Romans scrawled artless things on walls without a

thought that patient, myopic Germans would decipher them. And Elizabethans hurried unwilling tragedies to gory conclusions in haste to pay a pot-house score, untroubled by the dreadful vision of cultured audiences trying hard to enjoy them on distant Sunday evenings.

The printed word may last; and if it does, one feels our age to be in serious danger. For a busy pen or two, which claim to portray us, are drawing an almost fantastically misleading picture of our times. We are, it seems, an Age of Pleasure, a period in which freedom slowly broadens down from stimulant to stimulant. Rarely, if at all, do we get up; and if we go to bed, we go to bed in public. We live, I gather, in large droves in one another's rooms; and one or two of us wear the most becoming sweaters. Our knowledge of the world is confined to an acquaintance with a few names of streets in Paris; and with this formidable equipment (and the help of musical effects from the New World) we achieve a life of the utmost brilliance.

This pleasing portrait is painted with tireless repetition by a few industrious hands. To me it looks a trifle flattering. One sees these exquisites on the stage, but all too rarely in the stalls.

Round us a dreary world in bowler hats climbs patiently on to buses and goes to work. Married, it dines at home; single, it dines out in a desperate hope of marriage. Sometimes a cocktail beckons, sometimes a saxophone comes down the wind. But where is the reckless throng, the ever-open door, the elegant unemployed, the drift from club to club, from glass to glass? Yet these will be recognised at once by connoisseurs as the *indicia* of a Georgian portrait. The leading practitioner, scared by the rumble of distant pulpits, may show in his later versions the white feather of a blameless Coward. But still the stream flows on; and delighted audiences see themselves mirrored nightly in its bright surface, looking ever so much naughtier there than they had even hoped.

For it is the strange craving of Anglo-Saxons to seem wickeder than they are. When a stray dramatist accused the Celt of condoning murder, there was a riot in a Dublin theatre. But the sober Briton, emerging from his blameless home, loves to be told of his adorable naughtiness. This unexpected news at once flatters his secret pride and warms him with an inward glow of superior virtue. I leave some wiser head than mine to disentangle the complexes. But it

is enough for me (and Mr. Coward) to recognise the fact and act accordingly.

Such is the Briton's mood. Cheered on his dreary way by a coy intimation that he is travelling down the primrose path to the sound (strangely magnified by modern musical practice) of flutes, he comes again for more; and more, since Mr. Coward is a man of his word, he gets. The portrait flatters; the box-office expands in the unaccustomed sunshine; and if the matter ended there, no one—except the people who have paid for seats—would be a penny worse off. Some, in fact, would be considerably better off. And so, if it ended there, we should all be happy. But does it? Can we be sure that this will all evaporate with last year's fashions? Is there not a faint shadow of a haunting risk that some idiot in spectacles will one day suppose that this is what we were really like? That is my nightmare; and while there is still time, I wish to explain myself to posterity.

I am prepared to have our age judged by the prose style of Cabinet Ministers or the sculpture on Australia House or the painting of Mr. Frank O. Salisbury, because that is what we are really like. But I decline, with the utmost emphasis, to walk down the unending corridors of

Time in the company of an entirely non-existent species of saxophonous young woman. Yet I have an uneasy vision that this curious travesty will be accepted as a portrait of our time; that unborn dramatists, eager to reproduce the home life of Mr. Baldwin, will fill the stage with Mr. Coward's oddities, whilst unseen saxophones hoot, in a subdued *obbligato* that *they* want to *be* happy, and an audience of the Twenty-third Century murmurs: "How quite too wonderfully 1925, my dear!"

One has seen this sort of thing happen to harmless centuries before. The Elizabethan, a decent, sober man who went to a shipping office every day and was almost totally absorbed in the slave trade, comes down to us, owing to the irresponsible vagaries of a single dramatist, as an irrepressible patriot declaiming endlessly about "This precious stone set in the silver sea, This blessed plot, this earth, this realm, this England." The subjects of Charles II, to take a more distressing case that is closely analogous to our own, have been grossly misrepresented by Restoration dramatists. And one prays that our blameless age may never sink to the last indignity of being thought unfit for presentation

on any public stage except on Sunday nights and to subscribers only.

This is a matter for the exercise of the utmost care. One knows now the feelings of some contemporary of Plautus, who objected to the transmission of Rome to posterity as a city populated exclusively by dishonest slaves, half-witted fathers, and impertinent young women. Let us be warned in time; for it is not yet too late to act. I would suggest that some public body, if public bodies can read, should enclose this protest in some durable vessel. The vessel had better be one unconnected with refreshment, since that would contradict a vital part of my thesis. But, as evidence of date, a few contemporary objects might be included—a coin or so, some studs, perhaps a denture, and the usual razor blades and gramophone needles. The last two are essential, since I am convinced that our age will be dated by them; the best opinion will incline to the view that our Kings were invariably called Gillette. In inserting the document, care should be taken to delete everything else; since otherwise the attention of archæologists, who are invariably attracted by irrelevant matter, will be needlessly distracted. Then the vessel should be sealed and buried in

the neighbourhood of the Bank: they are sure to begin digging there.

Some such steps as these should be taken promptly. Posterity must know, when it reads our plays, that we were—as the author says at rehearsals—not a bit like it. Unless, of course, we are prepared to rely on the consoling fact that all comedies perish. Where is Menander, where the gentlemen who made us laugh in 1885? The only trouble is that perhaps some comedies do not perish quite quickly enough.

GENERAL STRIKE

FEW of us, very few of us indeed, are likely to forget in any hurry the cold spring of 1926. In the first place, the weather was more than usually detestable. But we had something more to talk about than the weather. Not that we Saw It Coming. That is the privilege of leader-writers, old gentlemen in clubs, and those Sunday oracles beneath whose eloquent pens their fellow-creatures stand perpetually at the Turning Point and the Parting of the Ways and in all those other critical situations which serve so admirably to fill a column. No one—except in history books—foresees the slow march of events. War came in 1914 and found Paris mainly concerned with the shooting exploits of Madame Caillaux; in 1870 it found France deep in domestic calculations of the probable duration of M. Émile Ollivier's well-meaning ministry; in 1793 it found Mr. Pitt wrapped tightly in his judicious anticipation that "unquestionably there never was a time in the history of this country, when, from the situation of Europe, we might more reasonably

expect fifteen years of peace." Did not the unforgettable Hammond assure his chief a week before the Ems telegram that he had never known so great a lull in foreign affairs? No one foresees any more freely in politics than on the race-course. People are only wise after the event. It is, when you come to think of it, the most convenient time for being wise.

So none of us foresaw the Strike. We were uncomfortably conscious of an interminable dispute about the mines. But we had seen those clouds before, had lived in the shadow of them —on and off—for something like five years. Sometimes, indeed, they hung a little lower; and sometimes they floated farther up. Patient Commissions listened to serried lines of witnesses, who demonstrated (if they were miners) that they were underpaid or proved with equal certainty (if they were mine-owners) that there was no means of paying higher wages. But the world at large was mainly indifferent—with the uneasy feeling that the bill would, in some form or other, be sent in to the tax-payer. So it discussed its private concerns, improving business, hopes of summer holidays, the franc, Spinelly, and the Australians.

And then it came. It was all . . . one hates

the analogy, but—to be frank—it was all a little like the War. There was the same surprise, the same sudden sense that the bottom had dropped out of things, and the same stupid threat to the ordered life of a community at peace. Our forty millions became sharply aware that persons with monosyllabic names, of whom they had never heard, were issuing orders to them. A Mr. Pugh commanded them to stop at home or, if they wished to go to work, to walk there. A Mr. Swales directed them to leave off reading newspapers. They saw their milk roll into London in most unexpected conveyances, because those unknown figures willed it; and under the influence of these highly remarkable events they became dimly aware that something was happening. With a sound instinct they forgot all about the miners, who played the ungrateful part assigned by fate a few years earlier to "gallant little Belgium." The miners had caused the trouble. But when a General Strike was called to aid them, they quickly receded from the public mind into a dim perspective.

What had occurred? The great Trade Unions had rushed to the rescue of the underground workers in a chivalrous desire to para-

lyse the community into providing more pay for them. But by doing so, they quite unwittingly raised a larger issue. Some of them—but not many—saw it; and some—but still fewer—welcomed it. For when Mr. Pugh and Mr. Swales issued their orders, they challenged by industrial action the right of Britain to order its own affairs in its own way. It was barely eighteen months since we had elected a House of Commons. Few of us viewed it with eyes of passionate affection; but at least, by the simple act of voting for or against its members, we had all a hand in making it. It gave us the not unmixed blessing of Mr. Baldwin's Government, which again we viewed with eyes largely undimmed by tears of devotion. Yet we knew that, as we had put them in, we could equally put them out at the next election, if we were minded to. They were—these Tory ministers—for all their airs and their vast majority, our own creation—a poor thing, but our own. We had accepted them with all their imperfections; and, if they misgoverned us, it was our fault for having given them the chance.

But here, in the wintry springtime, was a person of the name of Pugh who ordered us about, a Mr. Swales who told us how to behave,

a friend of his called Citrine who offered obligingly to see that we did not starve. And most of us—black-coated or shirt-sleeved, white-collared or tastefully knotted round the neck with a striped choker—profoundly disliked the picture; and it was our dislike that broke the Strike. There are, it must always be remembered, forty millions of us; and less than four millions had combined to give any authority whatever to our new dictators. We had dim recollections of school lessons about the long struggle of Parliament against misguided kings and unruly barons—and what, in the light of this eventful history, was Mr. Pugh? We had not elected him. He wore no crown. Perhaps he was a baron.

That, unintentionally, is precisely what he was. He never meant to be. But he had a touching faith in the exclusive privilege of his own section of the community to do as it pleased; and that hallucination leads barons to their worst mistakes. The error, in this instance, was just one more legacy of the War. For our Labour leaders formed their mental habits in that bad school. In war-time, when the uninterrupted functioning of the industrial machine was vital to the continuous supply of shells, a

Trade Union had only to permit a passing frown to deface its brow—and eager ministers granted its lightest requirements in nervous haste. This happy time endured for some years longer than the War itself. A judicious caution had dictated a similar deference during the industrial trouble of Mr. Lloyd George's later rule in 1919 and 1921; and its wisdom is, perhaps, hardly open to doubt. The war-shocked State was disinclined to look too closely into the merits of successive demands upon it, since the repose which it purchased was of far greater value than the Danegeld which was extorted. The habit (one sees it plainly now) grew upon Labour leaders. They revelled in their power —the crisis, the summons to Downing Street, the happy settlement. At the same time a loud minority looked hopefully towards the supersession of the old Parliamentary machine by this industrial aristocracy. Mr. Cook delighted weekly meetings of miners with the bright prospect of their new omnipotence; there was a thin trickle of imported nonsense about the dictatorship of the proletariat; and in this vague illusion serious Trade Unionists toyed with the notion of a General Strike.

That was the mood in which the miners

formed their grand alliance with the railwaymen and the transport workers. It was the war-time mood; and, stranger still, it chose a pre-war weapon. The General Strike had been brandished for years before the war, to break the sleep of nervous communities. They were, it must be confessed, easy enough to scare. A railway accident bristled their hair; the loss of the *Titanic* gave them a week of wild hysterics. But the post-war citizen of a European state is a hardier mortal. His trains are stopped—and he sits down on a bag to wait. His papers fail to arrive in time for breakfast—and he listens in. His milk is rationed—well, he has been rationed before. He has seen worse in France; or, if he never went up the Line, he—and she also, if it comes to that—has seen the street-lamps darkened and heard the Gothas whirring and the dull crash of bombs, the swish of shrapnel on the empty pavements. The public nerves are stronger since the War; and the moral effect of a General Strike, which must have scared a pre-war community into surrender, was reduced to *nil*. In that aspect, the threat failed for the simple reason that Labour in a war-time mood tried a pre-war weapon upon a war-hardened public.

A second cause led to its utter failure. The post-war citizen is a resourceful being. There is an abundance of steady-eyed persons who were temporary technicians of a dozen crafts during the War. And, above all, he—and she, too—drives a car. The General Strike reckoned without that paragon of private property, the family motor-car; and in the outcome petrol defeated steam.

I have tried to sketch the mind of the Labour leader and the common citizen, because the Labour leader made the Strike, and the common citizen broke it. There were few personalities besides. The Labour side was not, it must be confessed, unduly rich in figures apt for greatening. We knew too little of Mr. Swales, too much of Mr. Thomas, to erect them into magnificently Satanic figures, Princes of economic Darkness. Few capitalist infants were rocked to sleep with the menace that Mr. Citrine would catch them if they didn't. But scarce as such figures were on the other side, they were still scarcer on our own. One could not wield a fearless truncheon in a bâton-charge with the heartening cry of "St. George and Lord Birkenhead." The official intimation that Sir William Joynson-Hicks expects that every

man this day will do his duty struck few sparks from constabulary bosoms. So we made Mr. Baldwin do.

For it was vital, if we were all to be united in defence of the State, that it should be clear beyond all doubt that we were not asked to unite in defence of Big Business. We knew, indeed, that Mr. Baldwin had been a large employer. We knew also that his Party included all that was Biggest in the nation's Business. But, fortunately, we knew a little more than that. Had he not told us of his good intentions? We had believed him—and, still more significant, Big Business had believed him, too. Those shrewder judges, who see life from board-room windows and sit high in Tory counsels, had listened with obvious concern to their leader's views upon industry and regarded him in consequence with faint suspicion. That was his main passport to public esteem. We had heard the stiffer kind of reactionary call him "a sort of Socialist"; we saw the hands of Interests raised when his name was mentioned; we knew that the great employers felt a little unsafe beneath the vague menace of his good intentions. That was the best sign of all. He was not a "hard-faced" man; no Geddes he; we learned with audible

relief that there are certain industrial purposes for which gentlemen prefer Monds. Not that his colleagues heartened us. There was an uneasy feeling that Mr. Churchill might do something clever and that Sir William Joynson-Hicks might just do something. The suppression of newspapers effectually silenced Parliament; but the Elder Statesmen chimed in with a chorus of measured wisdom, of which Lord Oxford's was the promptest and Lord Balfour's the most reasoned. A strange feature was the total disappearance of Mr. Ramsay MacDonald and the parlour Socialists. For the Labour leaders brushed aside the solemn waxworks of their Front Bench. There was no sound from Mr. Sidney Webb, no word from Sir Patrick Hastings on a legal issue of vital concern to their supporters; and the House of Lords heard nothing from the Labour peers except the unhappy silence with which Lord Haldane answered an unpleasant question from Lord Birkenhead. Apart from Mr. Thomas, who alternately wrung his hands and clenched his fists, we saw nothing of the familiar constellations of the Labour firmament. Perhaps the weather was too bad for them. It was, as I have said, unseasonable.

Where did we get to? The citizen signally defeated the advocate of sectional loyalties; and we established once again our right to be governed by Parliament rather than by King John or by King Charles—or even by Mr. Pugh. Since there are parts of Europe where democracy was beginning to lose faith in itself, that victory may have its value beyond our shores. For ten whole days our politics were strictly logical; and in that time we established once again that majorities rule, that counting heads is far better than breaking them, that literal translations of German economics are hard to square with British facts, and that the Social Revolution is not coming just yet.

Which is the cause that few of us, very few of us indeed, are likely to forget in any hurry the cold spring of 1926.

Life Studies

THE DREAMER

THE dream ended on a June morning in 1846 between a portrait of his incomparable Mary and the vast canvas stretched to receive King Alfred and the First British Jury in his grandest manner. It was barely two months since inspiration—his customary inspiration—had visited him in the dawn and he leaped to the task, as usual, with prayer. This time his Maker positively must vouchsafe His blessing on "the beginning, progression, and conclusion, not only of Alfred, but the remaining three" to the greater glory of His gifts to Haydon, to say nothing of the painter's country and his long-suffering family. The prospect, to be sure, was far from bright. Those were the dreadful weeks when hand-bills solicited the attention of the polite world to Haydon's Aristides and Nero Burning Rome at the Egyptian Hall in Piccadilly. The gifted viewed them (at a shilling a head) in a thin, daily trickle that rarely exceeded twenty visitors. For a deeper appeal fell upon English ears that Easter; and as it sounded the rich note of a

younger nation, London streamed to see General Tom Thumb—

> They rush by thousands to see Tom Thumb. They push, they fight, they scream, they faint, they cry help and murder! and Oh! and Ah! They see my bills, my boards, my caravans, and don't read them. Their eyes are open but their sense is shut. It is an insanity, a rabies, a madness, a furore, a dream.

It was a dream that lasted, for the anguished painter, until his agonised statistic—"Tom Thumb had twelve thousand people last week; B. R. Haydon. 133½ (the ½ a little girl)." The dream was ending; though he had a few glorious spells of work on Alfred, and Sir Robert Peel found time, among the slings and arrows of the outrageous Disraeli, to send him fifty pounds. The Jury elicited great masses of drapery from his unwearied brush. But the dream ended on a June morning. His watch, his prayer-book, and his will all lay beside him on a table; and his diary, devoted to the last, was open at the final entry:

"22*nd*.—God forgive me. Amen.
Finis
of
B. R. Haydon

'Stretch me no longer on this rough
world.'—*Lear.*"

The dreamer was awake at last. It was a little after half-past ten, and the pale London sunshine crept across the silent room.

Now it was all a dream. The life of Haydon had always something dream-like about it. Sometimes it was a good dream, when they all dined with him in Lisson Grove—Lamb, Wordsworth, Keats, and a comptroller of stamps, who "seemed a gentleman." Lamb made innumerable speeches, called for toasts, challenged the solemn Wordsworth—"Now, you old Lake poet, you rascally poet, why do you call Voltaire dull?"—and drank to "the Messiah of the French nation, and a very proper one too." Then the comptroller, whose name nobody seemed able to remember, made them all stare by asking Wordsworth whether he did not think Milton was a great genius. Keats stared at Haydon; Wordsworth stared at his interlocutor; and Lamb woke up suddenly and called him a silly fellow, to shocked cries of "Charles! my dear Charles!" from Wordsworth. The Revenue was undismayed and added to his catalogue of genius the name of

Newton, whereupon Lamb removed a candle, gravely examined his bumps, and was removed in ecstasies of irreverence. Then there was the glorious day when Keats walked with him in the Kilburn meadows and said suddenly, "Haydon, what a pity it is there is not a human dust-hole," and the afternoon when he met Shelley at dinner—"I did not then know what hectic, spare, weakly yet intellectual-looking creature it was, carving a bit of broccoli or cabbage on his plate as if it had been the substantial wing of a chicken"—and engaged him in a terrific disputation, provoked by Shelley's rather simpering exordium, "As to that detestable religion, the Christian ——." He had memories of Grey and all the Whig ministers, of Palmerston politely listening to his rhapsodies on Greek art, and Melbourne a little sly even at his stupidest. His Wellington was a full-length, from his first notes eluding loyal dedications by the patriot painter to his refusal of sittings, coats and boots and the almost agonised plea that "He hopes that he will have some cessation of note-writing about pictures. The Duke knows nothing about the picture Mr. Haydon proposes to paint. At all events, he must decline to lend to anybody his clothes, arms and equip-

ments"—the whole gloriously crowned by Haydon's final invitation to Walmer, where his eyes feasted on his host, by turns aquiline, leonine, and romping with children.

Those were the good dreams. But sometimes the dream was bad, when patrons fell away, duns thickened, and the sky was dark with writs. The dream was sometimes behind bars in the King's Bench itself; but even there the indomitable dreamer improved the not too shining hour with sketches of depraved types and scenes of debtor life. His fidelity to art had something of Mr. Micawber's gravity—he would not, could not, did not ever desert her. He had lived faithful to her and, faithful yet, he died. He never knew that he had written one of the great books of the English language. How proud he would have been, even if it involved a second place for the Sublime in art and Aristides and the Mock Election, to say nothing of Pharaoh Dismissing the Israelites. But Haydon never knew his luck. Perhaps he had too little of it to know it when it came.

Misfortune followed him beyond the grave. His pictures scattered; for England never knew her ardent lover. One of them drifted somehow to the distant banks of the Ohio. But when a

stray Englishman enquired for it in Cincinnati (how many visitors in fifty years had ever asked to see their Haydon?), they told him that it had been taken to a Catholic Seminary a week or so before. So he even missed his solitary connoisseur. That was just poor Haydon's luck. Small wonder, though, that after such tragedy even his pictures take the veil.

MR. BELLOC: A PANORAMA

IS IT (perhaps it is) a discourtesy to tell Mr. Belloc that there are too many of him? His name is, so to speak, a collective, but scarcely a generic, noun; and the public mind, which is rarely equal to recognising a performer in more than a single part, begins to reel a little. For he is not only a prophet, but a procession; and the effect upon the patient observer, as he moves across the contemporary scene with the stamp and thunder of a stage crowd, is sometimes a trifle confusing. One feels that there are moments when, even for himself, he must create something of a traffic problem, when there is a hold-up at his cross-roads, as one of him goes by and blocks the way for all the others.

First, of course (and one feels sure that he would put him at the head of that marching column), there is a lyric poet, who plays airs of singular restraint and regular time in defiance of the best—or is it the worst?—contemporary models. This slight and wistful figure is followed in the line by two totally distinct varieties of poet. One of them, a noticeably stouter

gentleman, persists in roaring drinking choruses with a strong geographical bias in favour of villages in Sussex; whilst his friend, a thin-lipped, almost a morose person, dispenses rhyming satire about dons and public men. As those accomplished poets, Mr. Belloc, strike their diverse lyres, a whole crowd of old friends (what a nest of singing birds he is) goes with them—a patient mediævalist, an *amateur* of guns, a skilful epigrammatist, a passable master of the ballad—and of the *ballade* as well—and an accomplished (but, if the truth is to be confessed, a dullish) sonneteer as well. Then, four abreast and swinging down the road, come the serried files of prose-writers. A journalist elbows his way to the front and, sometimes a little shrilly, denounces public men for being Jews and Jews for the same offence; a historian of unusual eloquence declaims gravely upon the Revolution with a slight, but noticeable, French accent; a geographer makes little sketch-maps of Roman roads and mountain ranges and compares notes with the historian; whilst a well-known expert upon the art of war expounds the elements with the explanatory air of a determined teacher putting a particularly awkward piece of trigonometry to a deaf pupil

of limited mathematical attainments. There is a novelist or so in the procession, a notable pedestrian, and even (for nothing human is, within Nordic limits, alien to Mr. Belloc) an economist. A slightly erratic politician denounces stray abuses with an exquisite gift for personality; and somewhere down the line an essayist follows the casual curves of his irregular course. But one feels that he is rather looked down on by others as a literary man. So, with a happy burst of marching-songs and statistics and drinking-songs and devotional music and diagrams and sketch-maps, they all swing past in the sunshine; and as the happy crowd goes down the road, one is left staring a little ruefully after them into the dust.

I make no pretence that this Homeric catalogue is exhaustive. If, as they say, you do not see in the window the article that you require, Mr. Belloc has probably got it somewhere inside. I have omitted an artillery-driver, a considerable archæologist, the patient editor of Mr. Lambkin's *Remains*, and the voluble encyclopædia which once vociferated its way down the *Path to Rome*. Mr. Belloc has not yet, so far as I am aware and patient enquiry avails me, written an opera. But it would surprise none of his

admirers to learn that he was engaged on one. For one may count the art-forms which he has never practised and the branches of learning which he has never professed on the fingers of one hand. This terrific multiplicity of interests, which alarms a feeble generation, belongs to an earlier, braver age. We are accustomed to the narrow claims of the specialist, that depressing ignoramus. Mr. Belloc belongs to the older, wilder species of Men (as they used to be called) of Letters, learned men at large in the universe with a mind, a general education, the habit of cheerful dogma, and—better than all—a style.

It is instructive enough to watch him reduce a problem to its most elementary terms, state its axioms with elaborate lucidity, define his words, slaughter imaginary objectors, and announce his conclusions with a slow, unanswerable dignity that would leave his auditors far too exhausted to make an answer, even if there were one. It is fun to watch him bowl the Professors over, scatter the politicians (dealing particular destruction among the enemies of religion and light refreshment), and defy with his ringing challenge the few remaining infidels who doubt the literal inspiration of the French people

upon those rare occasions when it has deviated into republicanism.

But best of all, in one judgment, is to hear him play with a strange, lingering skill the incomparable instrument of English prose. He draws from those stiff keys (for under his hand they are often a little stiff) the full melody of which they are capable. His irony is sometimes a trifle jagged; and perhaps his solemn fun is a thought too solemn. The grave face which he preserves during those interminable farces is sometimes apt to check the laughter, and there are other moments when he is just a trifle boisterous for the modern palate. But put him at the highest fence of all—descriptive writing—at one of those scenes which demand, from the very nature of the event, a vivid picture viewed with repressed emotion; and he will paint you a picture, write you a page of prose which stays in the memory. And what prose-writer can do more?

One remembers *Mr. Clutterbuck* with glee, and innumerable guns with awe, and political skits with a faint sense of irritation. His skill at spinning an essay out of nothing is fantastic. He starts from nowhere in pursuit of nothing; hangs it with strange festoons of erudition about

the habits of horses, Roman roads, the Faith, or a forgotten corner of an obscure military operation in the last century but two; and ends, as an essayist should always end, nowhere. Perhaps his strange fecundity of random invention sometimes misleads him. These casual meanderings are apt to exasperate at one extreme almost as much as his undue precision at the other. But between the two, when he is neither flitting across ten topics in six lines or expounding a single truism in four pages, comes the true exercise of his own skill, which is the vivid presentation of historical scenes in the measured tones of a singularly pure English.

His *forte* is, as has been written, the repression of all emotion; and his peculiar gift is the suggestion of it, in the course of a plain description, by the quiver of a single phrase. Events which drive other narrators into an ecstasy of little sobs or an *abandon* of gesticulation, leave him unmoved. The catalogue of facts moves plainly on without disturbing his composure. But the grave voice and the measured utterance are far more moving to his reader than the whole pantomime of emotional effects. The end of *Danton*, whole pages in *The Eye Witness*, and, above all, the closing scenes of

Marie Antoinette display the method at its highest. There is the grave procession of events viewed with steady eyes, the slow list of facts recited in a level voice until:

> "Upon that scaffold before the gardens which had been the gardens of her home and in which her child had played, the Executioner showed at deliberation and great length, this way and that on every side, the Queen's head to the people."

That is the delicate use of English prose, a firm handling of the most difficult instrument in the whole range of language; and Mr. Belloc leaves us in his debt for a few pages of it more valuable than his learning, finer than his fun, and (dare one say?) more important than all his opinions.

THE BUCCANEER

THE outline seems familiar. As it comes up against the sky, we know it in an instant. For it is always seen against the sky, the deep and sunlit sky of the Spanish Main. The foreground is a little trivial—a carronade or so, some tangled cordage, perhaps a stiffening and disregarded victim, and a short stretch of planking which the marine attainments of the illustrator have littered generously with broken spars, a marline-spike, and a few fallen blocks. But our delighted eyes hurry across the scattered detail. For he stands beyond, superb upon his deck (or still more superb on someone else's); and behind him the inimitable background glows with its hint of hidden beaches beyond unknown headlands, and doubloons, and sea-chests, and pistoles—as it glowed so often (but, alas! no more) in the warm fancy of Howard Pyle and Lovat Fraser. That lonely figure in the laced hat and sea-boots redeems any picture. We ask no more than ruffles at the wrist and pistols in the belt. The magic never fails. Set him upon his deck and—however odd the naval

architecture—scuppers (there must be scuppers somewhere) run with blood, while masts, wherever placed, taper deliciously towards the glorious suggestion of a black ensign fluttering against a startled sky. For he walks a pirate's deck, and a pirate's hand rests on a pirate's hip in pirate *hauteur*.

How sad that piracy has faded. Lamentable indeed that Execution Dock has done its work so well, and Long John Silver sleeps with the dodo and the two-toed horse. The purged seas lap idly against our coasts; our ships go up and down the world without so much as a treacherous supercargo or a wide-eyed boy with a sound moral instinct and a precocious gift for narrative; and our ensigns are red, blue, white, yellow, and green, occasionally mauve, but never black. For piracy has vanished, and ardent *amateurs* collect its traces. It has become a parlour rarity for mild-eyed bibliographers to catalogue its "firsts" and collate its title-pages. Kidd is a curio, Morgan and Blackbeard an association item. For piracy is dead. No more the shot from a bow-chaser and the boarding party; no more the spoil, the lonely figure, and the sinking sun. Even in commerce, last and most secret of its beaches, it begins to yield be-

fore a quickening public conscience and an unpleasant tendency in Governments to legislate against the buccaneer. Only, perhaps, in politics . . .

II

A flagstaff in Downing Street is the last place to look for a Jolly Roger. To the casual eye that brief but decorous thoroughfare appears to be entirely given over to policemen, press photographers, and persons in search of the entrance to the Foreign Office. But besides these (and the Prime Minister's door-knocker) it contains premises of less soaring notoriety than No. 10. For, unexpectedly, that famous multiple has neighbours. Less numerous, perhaps, than other people's, they are sufficient—if gossip be correct, more than sufficient. Untroubled by the dog at No. 1, the cat at No. 2, the parrakeets at No. 3, the Premier knows nothing of the tonic sol-fa across the way at No. 5, the twins at No. 8, the scales at No. 7, or the incessant clarionet at No. 6. These humane delights are for lesser subjects. But though the official ingenuity of successive Postmasters-General has never succeeded in detecting any

letter-box in Downing Street for the insertion of postal matter addressed to No. 9, the door of No. 10 is not alone. For, before the exhausted street subsides down a flight of steps into the Horse Guards Parade, it achieves a second number; and there are tenants at No. 11—and tenants of the highest standing. The house, indeed, is occupied by the Chancellor of the Exchequer. It is a modest mansion, as becomes the residence of one whose waking hours are spent in inducing economy in others. It is even a trifle sombre. Yet it wears a tidy flagstaff; and when the resident was Mr. Winston Churchill, those halyards might have worn without ineptitude the Jolly Roger.

A less alarming ensign was flown on public holidays. But one felt that the Skull and Crossbones would not be uncongenial to the tenant: perhaps he ran it up at nights. For Mr. Churchill has always something about him of those splendid solitaries whose ghostly keels still grate on lonely beaches, as the moon comes up by Nombre Dios. Can it be his transatlantic blood? For his hand, like theirs, is on his hip, his elbow on a carronade, his eye watchful, like theirs, for all comers. He has never sailed for long in the obedient convoys of strict party discipline,

but early broke away and ran for the open sea and wide horizons of his personal preference. Those were the days when he was a Tory hopeful with a lively pen. The pen, the tongue as well, was vigorously plied. But as promotion tarried (they were the gentle closing days of Cecil nepotism) the hopes began to die. For youths from Blenheim had little future under a Hatfield dynasty; and the young Churchill, rarely reposeful, grew definitely restless. Came at this crucial moment a lively issue, which sent him careering out of his party on the Free Trade question. The Tory brave was copiously sprinkled with the pure milk of Mr. Cobden's word. He watched his arms before that blameless altar; and, these rites concluded, he was received into the victorious Liberal hosts of 1906. For eight congested years of office he seemed capable of party allegiance. He was (the phrase rings oddly in such a context) a sound party man. His voice intoned the full litany of Tory sinfulness and Liberal virtue in the bright days of People's Budgets, Peers recalcitrant and foiled, land taxes, and resounding Land Songs. The accent was always personal, the idiom rich with his vivid, slightly laboured imagery. But

at least, a Liberal. But his deep conviction of the depravity of Russian Communism and of its weak-kneed friends in British Labour disqualified him for sincere collaboration with his Liberal friends. For Liberals, however little addicted to extremes themselves, are strangely tolerant of extremes in others. Besides, they felt (and Mr. Churchill did not) a kindness for the antics of the Labour Party, which included periodical obeisances before the highly novel shrine of Russia. Once more he faced an issue, took his bearings, and parted company with the obedient convoy of his party. This time his transition to the enemy's fleet was gradual. But after a slightly equivocal phase in which bewildered voters encountered him as a "Constitutionalist," the Tory colours fluttered to his masthead once more. The Conservative Armada dipped its ensigns, paid its customary tribute to intelligence, made him its Chancellor; and he dwells secure with Mr. Baldwin.

But even here some flavour of the lone wolf still clings to him. Once a Tory among the Liberals, he is now something of a Liberal among the Tories. Did not his earliest Budget shock the ranks behind him (and draw surprising cheers from those in front) with Widows' Pensions?

but early broke away and ran for the open sea and wide horizons of his personal preference. Those were the days when he was a Tory hopeful with a lively pen. The pen, the tongue as well, was vigorously plied. But as promotion tarried (they were the gentle closing days of Cecil nepotism) the hopes began to die. For youths from Blenheim had little future under a Hatfield dynasty; and the young Churchill, rarely reposeful, grew definitely restless. Came at this crucial moment a lively issue, which sent him careering out of his party on the Free Trade question. The Tory brave was copiously sprinkled with the pure milk of Mr. Cobden's word. He watched his arms before that blameless altar; and, these rites concluded, he was received into the victorious Liberal hosts of 1906. For eight congested years of office he seemed capable of party allegiance. He was (the phrase rings oddly in such a context) a sound party man. His voice intoned the full litany of Tory sinfulness and Liberal virtue in the bright days of People's Budgets, Peers recalcitrant and foiled, land taxes, and resounding Land Songs. The accent was always personal, the idiom rich with his vivid, slightly laboured imagery. But

at least, a Liberal. But his deep conviction of the depravity of Russian Communism and of its weak-kneed friends in British Labour disqualified him for sincere collaboration with his Liberal friends. For Liberals, however little addicted to extremes themselves, are strangely tolerant of extremes in others. Besides, they felt (and Mr. Churchill did not) a kindness for the antics of the Labour Party, which included periodical obeisances before the highly novel shrine of Russia. Once more he faced an issue, took his bearings, and parted company with the obedient convoy of his party. This time his transition to the enemy's fleet was gradual. But after a slightly equivocal phase in which bewildered voters encountered him as a "Constitutionalist," the Tory colours fluttered to his masthead once more. The Conservative Armada dipped its ensigns, paid its customary tribute to intelligence, made him its Chancellor; and he dwells secure with Mr. Baldwin.

But even here some flavour of the lone wolf still clings to him. Once a Tory among the Liberals, he is now something of a Liberal among the Tories. Did not his earliest Budget shock the ranks behind him (and draw surprising cheers from those in front) with Widows' Pensions?

Was not his intervention in the coal strike, while his leader sipped his water at Aix, an interlude of mildness in the Everlasting Nay of pure Conservatism? For he is still a solitary. The silhouette comes up against the sky. The deep background glows behind the buccaneer, eternally superb upon his deck—or is it someone else's?

III

But there is a larger aspect in which he seems to play an even lonelier hand. For he must strike a close observer as a vividly personal figure in the deepening anonymity of our times. Ours is, beyond a doubt, the age of organisations, great aggregates of nameless individuals, which are themselves so nearly nameless as to run mostly to initials. We have the felicity to be born into the age of the T.U.C. The N.U.R. bends softly above our cradles; our infant brows are fanned by the N.U.T., our paths are lighted by the A.E.U. Our whole existence is an organised affair presided over by these anonymous deities; and far above them all, sitting (like Lord Tennyson's "Freedom") on the heights, the L. of N. observes its own feature-

less reflection in the Lake of Geneva. In this depressing Pantheon Mr. Churchill must appear as a lively rebel. No anonymity for him. That thrusting profile was never buried for long in the unnamed executive of an initialled body. "He believes quite naively that he belongs to a peculiarly gifted and privileged class of beings to whom the lives and affairs of common men are given over, the raw material for brilliant careers." That was the angry protest of a modern voice, when Mr. H. G. Wells encountered his anti-Bolshevism. Indeed, he was extremely angry. But his diagnosis may still be of service:

> He shares the blood of the brilliant and erratic New York Jeromes. . . . His imagination is obsessed by dreams of exploits and a career. It is an imagination closely akin to the d'Annunzio type. In England d'Annunzio would have been a Churchill, in Italy Churchill would have been a d'Annunzio. He is a great student and collector of the literature of Napoleon I, that master adventurer. Before all things he desires a dramatic world with villains—and one hero. And I think if we had the patience to probe carefully into his sayings and doings it would become very plain to us that this wild antagonism to the Bolsheviks is a mask and a diversion from his real dread, which is

> a dread of a coming sanity, a coming supremacy of justice and order throughout the world, that will keep adventurers in their places or lay them by the heels. The steadfast drift of the civilizing process is to deal with adventurous politicians, adventurous property and finance, and adventurous manners as a nuisance. . . . He struggles against this bleak dawn of reason and responsibility in a world that was once so flaringly adventurous.

It is a bitter diagnosis. For Mr. Wells was (perhaps pardonably) extremely angry. But it is strikingly in line with the haunting fancy of the lonely figure walking its poop with pistols at its belt.

One feels that Mr. Churchill will be miserably out of place in a world that succeeds (if ever it does) in banishing personal colour and transacts its business in drab synods of nameless delegates in session at the T.U.C.—and even the L. of N. His critic's portrait was a trifle angry. But was it wholly unjust? May we not recognise a few, at least, of his features in the lively figure of "Rupert Catskill, the Secretary of State for War," who paraded his splendid militancy quite unashamed through the Utopia of pure research and summer un-

derwear in which Mr. Wells conducted the exquisite speculations of *Men Like Gods?* The outward portrait was as brilliant as *amateurs* of that studio might have expected—the virtuosity in hats, the "slight impediment in his speech, the little brother of a lisp, against which his voice beat gutturally," even the naughtiness of that first look at his audience on the hillside in Futurity—"He put back his coat tails, rested his hands on his hips, thrust his head forward, regarded his audience for a moment with an expression half cunning, half defiant, muttered something inaudible and began." There is the husk of Mr. Churchill perfectly portrayed, if without any touch of superfluous affection. It was, one must remember, painted within three years of the sitter's disagreement with the artist over the destinies of Russia. But something deeper emerges from his imaginary speech, that startling reminder of the Utopians that their ordered happiness, far from "the bracing and ennobling threat and the purging and terrifying experience of war," is nothing more than "autumnal glory! Sunset splendour! *While about you in universes parallel to yours, parallel races still toil, still suffer, still compete and eliminate and gather strength and energy!*"

Follows the amazing parable of the little garrison on Quarantine Crag, with Mr. Churchill (I beg pardon—Catskill) planning the conquest of a world with his head full of Cortez and Pizarro. The portrait is unkind. But is it fundamentally unjust?

In a world of increasing tedium, of deepening discipline and the rising tide of anonymity Mr. Churchill's figure remains—annoyingly to some, to others hearteningly—conspicuous. His name is one of the few in contemporary politics that is still sure of its answering cheer or groan in a topical song. That thrusting figure has the old prominence of public men in days when Disraeli, Gladstone, Chamberlain were names for lion-comiques to conjure with. Except in the concerted dreariness of public meetings, to which men come exclusively to cheer or hoot, who cheers or hoots for Baldwin, for MacDonald, for whatever blameless incarnation of Liberalism may be improvised as a despairing substitute for Mr. Lloyd George? Yet Mr. Churchill draws that fire infalliby. And some of his prominence, perhaps, is due to the consoling fact that here, for once, is a figure that stands—not for some dismal group of party delegates agreeing on the

lowest common denominator of their principles, but for himself. Not in the baser sense of crude ambition—although he has, of course, the confident belief of all self-reliant men that he alone can save his country and that countries are not saved by speeches, however sage, delivered by statesmen in Opposition. But his strength in popular feeling (and in an odd way he has climbed from depths of unpopularity to a measure of public esteem) reposes in the simple fact that he is, undeniably and upon all occasions, himself. That self may not infrequently vary its course. But yet the stars by which it steers are reasonably fixed—ordered society, armed and conscious power, a sense of social justice with an eye that sometimes wanders to her sword when it would be better employed upon her scales. Was it unpardonable error in an essayist to appraise him five years since in the single ejaculation, "High up on the short waiting-list of England's Mussolinis one finds the name of Winston Spencer Churchill"?

His idiosyncrasy inevitably repels the pure collectivist. For those who love the anonymity of Leagues and Unions this vivid personal appeal is almost unspeakably distasteful. There

may be substance in the darker indictment of Mr. Wells that he is a lover of the jungle, a friend of the glorious imperfections of the Age of Confusion, a genuine reactionary. Perhaps. We shall not know until the world has finished with him. At any rate he is a figure to speculate about—and that is more than can be said of most of his colleagues and nearly all his rivals (perhaps the terms are synonymous). For he has at least an outline. As it comes up against the sky, it seems familiar. For it is always seen against the sky, the deep and sunlit sky of the Spanish Main.

PORTRAIT OF A LADY

COLUMBUS (the facts are incontestable) discovered America. But there is a companion picture. Time, as they say, has its revenges. Indeed, it is one of the charms of history that it is so vindictive. That, to digress, is presumably why the ancients imagined Clio as a lady: no man could ever have had such a memory for old scores. For, as a great naturalist (who was a still greater humorist) once wrote, women and elephants never forget an injury. The Muse of history is a woman; and, to judge from their style, most historians appear to have interpreted a shade too literally the remark about elephants.

But, in a general sense, the lesson of history is undeniable. If you march east across your border with waving flags and beating drums, a later generation will march west against your country and make your sons sorry that you ever existed. Napoleon learned that lesson within a single lifetime: the sole visible result of riding into Moscow was that Cossacks, two years later, rode into Paris. And so it is in almost

every branch of human activity. Eager missionaries torture the intelligence of China with Christian apologetics; and the East replies by devastating the Western mind with the elusive subtleties of Mah Jong. Two generations of British novelists inflicted upon patient American readers the life-stories of English yokels. A continent is slow to anger. But, in the end, America, by a just revenge, retorts with the serried line of those minute bulletins of life in the Middle West which now compel our awed attention. Is it not written: an eye for an eye, and a yawn for a yawn?

So every march in history brings its countermarch; each victory has, somewhere behind, its ineluctable defeat; and across every match that we ever see lies the long shadow of the return match that is to come after. By this even-handed law there is a companion picture to the bright vignette of Columbus exulting on his quarter-deck. Europe, on that October evening, discovered America. But, about four centuries later, America discovered Europe.

Research has placed the discovery in the later years of Queen Victoria. The scene is familiar to most historians; but one may, perhaps, retrace its outline. The ships (there were

several of them) drew nearer to a low line of coast. Attentive mariners lined the bulwarks; and the explorers (they had clear voices and good figures) went below and began to do their hair. For women in that age had hair to do. Perhaps the land ahead would prove to be inhabited; at any rate, they took no risks. It was. They stepped ashore with brilliant smiles; and their decorative precautions were abundantly justified by the appreciation of the simple-minded natives, who stared, cheered, and took their photographs. They married the fair explorers in quite considerable numbers. They even raised them, with savage ceremony, to the rank of tribal dignitaries.

Such, as one seems to see it, was the discovery of Europe about the year 1892, which completed half our noble families with an American wife and supplied Mr. Somerset Maugham with a theme for slightly acrid drama. It has not yet found its Prescott. Perhaps, if one had time . . . At any rate, the Conquistadores of that invasion made real conquests.

The gallant vivacity of Lady Astor seems, in a sense, a legacy from that blithe incursion. True, the name that she bears is not quite

Churchill, or even Curzon. But she has all the flavour of those bright American wives who crowded on all canvas and sailed into the smooth waters of English life under the reassuring colours of an ancient name. Somehow, one half forgets that her title practically came with her across the sea. She wears about her that slightly defiant air; she seems to utter that sharp, but rather penetrating, little challenge which we had grown to expect from American wives in Stately English Homes. An ancient Earl, one feels, is periodically scandalised by their firm demand for calm. Family retainers pull long faces when her ladyship rings for waffles. And the kindly tolerance which a genial husband has inherited from a long line of genial husbands is sometimes almost strained when his impulsive mate insists upon terrapin in the decorous shades of Claridge's Hotel.

It is a traditional part; and Lady Astor's spirited rendering of it is barely marred for our enjoyment by the circumstance that her title is almost as recent an immigrant as herself. For she seems so nearly the spiritual heir of Lady Randolph Churchill and all the other Pizarros of the early conquest that one inevitably places her in that bright, exalted gallery.

That poise she carries admirably; and there is a further *rôle* expected of American wives, which she plays almost to perfection. Generations spent in anxious scrutiny of its charming visitors had led the Old World to look for a particular quality in them. Women in Europe are expected, are positively encouraged to be Womanly—or even Ladylike. But when they come over with the Gulf Stream, tradition has laid it down that they should be Feminine. One hesitates to define: one merely states the fact.

So Lady Astor, when she came to take up the part, assumed a further burden of interpretation. She was expected, as an American wife, to insist with a perpetual innuendo upon her sex; to indicate—sometimes archly, sometimes, perhaps, with pathos—that she was not as other men are; to be, in the word that begs the entire question, Feminine. She took up the task. She bore the burden bravely. She even exceeded her instructions slightly; and when the stage directions said "Be Feminine," she passed into the superlative and was Feminist.

The mirthless columns of organised womanhood were joined in their solemn march by this vivacious *vivandière*. By a strange irony, she led the way into the House of Commons. Once

there, she gave an exhibition of deportment which must have exasperated her sisters in the cause—one hardly dares to think how gravely. Those gloves, that natty hat, her arch insistence upon her femininity may well have tortured the suffering sisterhood more than all the brutalities of every prison-warder that ever tried to persuade a Suffragist to swallow her principles and take her breakfast. For generations those severe females had insisted that, in spite of all evidence to the contrary, they were just the same as men—and here, here positively was their standard-bearer, assuring the giggling Commons that she was quite different.

Perhaps she was right: a man cannot presume to judge. But in a few short afternoons at Westminster she gracefully veiled the more forbidding parts of Feminist propaganda. She revived, in all its splendour, the fast-dying myth of the Fair, Frail Sex. She taught a respectful House that Only a Woman Knows. She revived the faded reputation of Woman's Homely Mother Wit. To some of us that achievement may seem a service of high value. But, then, some of us are men. What the stern ladies may have thought, one never ventured to enquire.

Sometimes, of course, this fluttering vivacity involved its dangers. Playfulness with the procedure of the House of Commons has its risks; and eager reporters were always on the watch. There was one summer afternoon when Lady Astor, in pursuit of Reform, encountered the obstructive presence of Sir Frederick Banbury.

Such are the painful contacts of vivacity with the British Constitution. But they are the least important thing about her part in public life. What matters about her is not in the least that she is American, or even that she is a woman. The public has a poor memory for these minor peculiarities; and if Lady Astor had nothing more significant about her than her birth or her skirts, she would have been forgotten years ago. For the British limbo is full of extinct American duchesses; and who ever hears to-day the once dreaded name of Pankhurst? The lasting interest of Lady Astor depends on something infinitely more commonplace. She seems to be right-minded upon the oldest and most unsolved of all British problems, the Condition of the People. Returned to Parliament by a devoutly Tory borough and sitting among the cosy adversaries of change, she moves unweariedly towards a reasonable betterment of conditions.

It is not easy for an avowed Conservative to escape from the current prejudices upon these topics. But, with rare courage, she achieves it. Irritable brewers are compelled to listen to a member of their party who denies the party creed that beer is inseparable from the Church of England and the Throne, and that any sacrilegious hand laid upon one gravely endangers all three. Her opinions are sometimes urged a little shrilly. But in her party she seems to stand almost alone; and nothing strains the voice so much as being a minority. Perhaps she is not Conservative at all. For her party loyalty is sometimes sadly frayed; and one likes to think that it is a mere accident of marriage, that she got her party with her name; and since a Radical Astor is barely thinkable, she was labelled Conservative.

It is a strange misnomer. Her generous advocacy of progressive causes has nothing in common with that grudging concession to necessity, that long rear-guard action of retreating Privilege which our reactionaries miscall Social Reform. She is an ardent Radical tied by a matrimonial accident to the Right. But she moves steadily Leftwards.

SIR WILLIAM JOYNSON-HICKS: A MEMORY

DEAR SIR WILLIAM,—

I trust that you will excuse the unusual familiarity of not addressing you as "Jix." But your career has been so short already that further abbreviation seems almost indelicate.

Should this communication meet your eye, please class me (in spite of the difference of our ages and politics) as an Unknown Admirer. I rather think it will, although I do not mean to post it; because few men in public life leave the impression of giving more loving study to their press-cuttings.

Sometimes I almost feel that you could forgive my friend (and yours), David Low, for the enormous liberties that he takes with your laundry. After all, the fame of Mr. Gladstone rests largely on the collars invented for him by Harry Furniss. So why not yours?

But my admiration has a more sentimental basis. I value you as a reminder of my lost youth. Each time that you cross the Lobby inside the swinging skirts of that Victorian frock-

coat, I am reminded irresistibly of the vanished age of hansoms and horse-omnibuses, when statesmen really dressed the part and looked as though politics were something in the nature of a funeral. For you must surely be Mr. Clarkson's ideal of a Cabinet Minister—I once saw a whole stageful of them on the boards of Drury Lane in a glorious thriller, in which the Prime Minister dropped dead on the floor of the House of Commons after declaring war on Russia—manifestly a part for you.

Besides, the sight and sound of you stirs memories that are still dearer. Long years ago, when there were pantomimes at Christmas instead of second-rate revues, I saw an extremely angry giant followed round the stage by a disrespectful little man, who asked at intervals between the outbursts of the giant's fury, "'Oo is it owes 'im the ninepence?" I always feel that somebody should follow you through the labyrinths of public life uttering that plaintive enquiry. Because you seem to be so angry. And, what is worse, you are angry with the oddest things.

The smallest causes seem sufficient to inspire your stern, official indignation; and Home Office thunderbolts are rained upon the homeliest

and most trivial objects. The sale of cold pies after hours is more than you can bear; your brow clouds, if you hear that someone has managed to obtain a rubber ring for his invalid umbrella at a bookstall after the clock has struck; and at the thought of a young gentleman in the theatre buying sweets for the young lady next to him after Act II, blood rushes to your head. And yet you sometimes seem to be so easy-going. For if he had only bought the sweets after Act I, you would have nodded kindly approbation from your box and murmured to Lady Joynson-Hicks that we were all young once. The pie, as well—that would have been all right if it had crossed the counter ten minutes earlier, or even if it had only been a hot one.

What on earth is it all about? What is the basis of this narrow prejudice in favour of hot pies, this passion for standing over us with a stop-watch in your hand to see if we are shopping at the right moment? I am an easy-going man. But I dislike nothing more than being treated as if I were Arcos, because I merely wished to buy some cigarettes. I sometimes think that you presume a little: we only wanted to engage a Home Secretary, not a nurse.

Of course I know the answer. These imbecile restrictions, which are the last legacy of "Dora" to her grateful heirs, form part of a code of early-closing legislation. Well, if they do, you have no shadow of a moral right to impose them under an Act for the Defence of the Realm against its foreign enemies. You might just as well contend that they form part of the Emergency Regulations made for the late General Strike. Someone should have the courage to inform you that the War is over. Ask Mr. Churchill at the next Cabinet. Didn't he write a book to tell us how he won it?

If there is any case for these restrictions (and the whole heavenly host of others), your plain duty is to embody them in a Shops and Traders (Obstruction of) Bill, introduce it to the House of Commons, explain its merits, run the gauntlet of public opinion, and let us regulate our habits for ourselves. But that, I fear, is hardly what you want. For you prefer to do it for us. You have an appetite for regulation that is positively Socialist—and you are the last man in England who would desire to be mistaken for Mr. Sidney Webb. Yet a satirist once depicted that eminent Utopian as a small boy upon his birthday morning playing on the floor

with a fine new set of toy Inspectors and Citizens, in which the Citizens were considerably outnumbered by the Inspectors. And that, though you may not know it, is where you are getting to.

There is so much to do and so little time in which to do it. Will England be a better place, because intending purchasers of a half-bottle of whisky are made to buy a bottle at a time? Is it Temperance reform or what?

Your own official life is crowded; for I do not doubt your habits of industry. But when you might be thinking out the sad lot of the Metropolitan Police, more than half of whom are kept at cross-roads wearing bishops' sleeves and making mesmeric passes at bewildered motorists instead of catching cat-burglars, you are kept busy fussing over night clubs and the sale of pies. Will you not believe that there are really some matters in which we are capable of looking after ourselves? Perhaps not many. But just a few. When we lapse into crime, we all expect you to interfere. But until that moment comes, we should infinitely prefer you to mind your own absorbing and important business. We know that it absorbs you. For Home Office habits have even invaded your domesticities.

Do you recall the dreadful morning when your silk hat was missing? The flat was searched; and then, as you gloriously informed a reporter, "I telephoned for a detective in the ordinary way." The Yard was prompt; the Big Five sprang to attention; and the Flying Squad flew over London. The hat, if I remember, was subsequently recovered, slightly in need of ironing, from the cradle of your newspaper-boy's younger brother. Happy the man who can invoke the C.I.D. to find his missing collar-studs.

But the meticulous control of private habits by public law is an awkward undertaking. The present condition of the United States would hardly seem to provide a very encouraging example. But if you continue to flirt with "Dora," we may enjoy a not dissimilar spectacle over here. Bootleggers will hawk caramels at prohibited hours; masked pie-merchants will sell their contraband from concealed addresses; umbrella rings will be obtainable by knocking three times on the counter; and if we know the pass-word, we shall be able to obtain post-cards—and even mineral waters—at the most unholy hours.

What nonsense it all is. But is it not rather worse than nonsense? For over-government is

no less a vice than anarchy; and you are heading briskly in that direction. When a crop of recent cases excited comment, you had the enterprise to appoint a committee of enquiry, and a touching piety impelled you to include Lady Joynson-Hicks among its members. About these chocolates, now. Is there no younger member of your family who might be asked?

I remain,

YOUR RATHER DISOBEDIENT SERVANT.

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Personal

THE NIGHT OUT: A RESEARCH

I ALWAYS like to think that I am a thoughtful man. Some of my friends fly even higher and derive immense (if secret) satisfaction from the contemplation of themselves in still loftier characters. For these private impersonations colour our whole existence. I know one man who is incapable of walking down a street without assuming the *rôle* of ratepayer. The part is simply dressed; but he turns a proprietorial eye on dust-carts, swells with pride when a housing scheme afflicts the sky-line, and passes the more stimulating posters outside cinema theatres with the stern glance of a Watch Committee. Others, more jaunty, prefer to see themselves as Men of the World, an illusion sedulously fostered by counsel when addressing juries of blameless persons, whose histrionic energies are almost wholly absorbed in a praiseworthy effort not to appear too shocked. Some, too, are those Britons who never, never . . . ; and the Labour movement must be full of men who thrill to know themselves to be the authentic "Ah! my friends" of Mr.

MacDonald's frequent invocations. I have even one humble friend who is, who knows he is, the Man in the Street. But, for myself, I always like to think that I am a thoughtful man.

It is a sober part, involving little personal activity, but a good deal of quiet dignity. You must have read about him in the papers. Rarely to be found in the vulgar turmoil of the news columns, he makes repeated appearances in those more cloistered shades where editors intone their grave opinions. Surely you must remember him—"The thoughtful man will pause to ask himself. . . ." Or again, "The thoughtful man cannot read without grave concern the news from . . ." Now, that was me.

The part, as I observed, is sober; since it consists mainly in gloomy reflections of a slightly obvious character upon the events of the day. I find that I am expected (with or without the customary pause) to view with alarm, with anxiety, or—in rare moments of gaiety—with mixed feelings the more depressing items of the news. My services are rarely in request when anything in the least cheerful is under contemplation. Search, if you will, your memory and try to recall a single instance in which the thoughtful man has recorded his

opinions upon a fall in rents or the departure of a popular actor for a long tour in Australia. These happy themes are reserved for other eyes, while that pale brow is bent above its fellow-countrymen in deep depression, and those reflections are of an almost uniformly melancholy character. It is not, I can assure you, much fun to be a thoughtful man.

But there is one side of his work that is lit by a wintry gleam. From time to time in the course of his lugubrious duties he is called upon to study the amusements of his fellow-creatures. "Confronted by the garish spectacle of our pleasure-seeking age, the thoughtful man . . ." Ah! I thought you would remember him now. He puts on a dress-suit and sallies out in search of dismal conclusions. He sees a film and sobs. He sees a play and sighs. He hears a saxophone and thinks. He hears a tango band and asks himself a question. One of the most remarkable things about the thoughtful man is his odd weakness for talking to himself. He is perpetually addressing questions to himself—in default, one concludes, of other company. For we thoughtful men are poor companions.

Having run a melancholy eye over the nor-

mal amusements of my fellow-creatures, I found little else to do in the evenings than sit at home and study the news with grave concern, rising at moments to a *crescendo* of alarm. Of the saxophone I knew all that I desired, of the trap-drum all that it would let me. I had asked myself all possible questions about the drama, and there was nothing on the variety stage which I did not view with mixed feelings. But one field remained to be explored. There was a branch of popular amusement on which I was profoundly uninformed. For large numbers of my fellow-creatures went (so the papers told me) to boxing matches. They paid, it appeared, quite considerable sums for seats and occupied them during entire evenings of delicious sport. "Come," I cried, "the thoughtful man must do his duty. He shall see a Big Fight. It may, perhaps, inspire the jaded pleasure-seeker to ask himself a question."

I went, I confess, in that spirit of somewhat exaggerated innocence in which the late W. T. Stead took to visiting the theatre at an advanced age and confiding his impressions to his spiritual grandchildren. I had not the remotest notion what it was all about; but I went to see. And here is what I saw.

The Albert Hall was very nearly full: that, to begin with, was well worth seeing. I had usually been forced to listen to political speeches in order to see it. But this time there was a welcome silence, broken at intervals by a most delightful gong. The lighting, too, was excellent. In place of the customary blaze I found a welcome dimness except in the very centre of the hall, where a ring rose out of the floor in a bright glare of bluish light. In the ring two young men leant incuriously against one another, except for those brief intervals when a gentleman in a dinner-jacket was able to distract them and persuade them to come apart. These intervals were mainly spent in rest and refreshment of an arduous character in opposite corners of the ring. "So this," I muttered to myself, "is the Ring. For this Regency bucks ran wild. Those very ropes hold the fatal lure that led a dozen noble houses to mortgage and disaster. Beat, heart; throb, pulse; shine, eye." But they refused.

Chilled by this disappointment, I read the programme; and then the pulse, which had treacherously refused its office, throbbed faster. Here was a fountain of the purest prose which alone was worth the money. For in brief

sketches of the combatants some unknown stylist revealed a new world of language, that promised a fresh lease of life for our fast dying tongue. His first subject "had a meteoric career, though nevertheless a brilliant one." I took a deep breath and read on. I was rewarded—"belonging to Leeds, and it was after some experience in the fistic game in the Yorkshire city that he realised the greater possibilities of becoming domiciled in London." What dignity to lend to the simple fact that someone had moved from Leeds to London. What *verve*, what . . . but I was recalled from the stylistic delights of the programme by events below.

For there *were* events below. A protracted contest was drawing inevitably, like an unending goods train, to its end. The two contestants leant on one another without interest; a placid gentleman in evening dress parted them intermittently. Trench warfare ended at last in the faint activity of the closing moves. Eight thousand faces watched a little languidly. The fighting died down and ceased. Eight thousand pairs of ears listened incuriously for the conjurer to announce the winner—and then, oh rapture! he announced him wrong. Or so, at least, eight thousand people seemed to say. He

left, a trifle hurriedly. So did his fancy. But the defeated hero stayed gesticulating in the ring; and eight thousand of his fellows hooted. Whom they were hooting was not particularly clear. But they hooted quite magnificently. Then someone made a speech about someone else; and still they hooted. It has not yet fallen to me, in a brief political career, to hear eight thousand boos. But it is a splendid sound. I shall remember to leave when it begins.

After that the organ played, and the evening's sport was almost done. On the way home I had a pleasing example of the uncanny insight of the Metropolitan Police. I had walked north across the Park; and somewhere in Bayswater a night policeman checked me. I was, as I thought, an ordinary man without any obvious marks of pugilism about me. No boxing gloves trailed from my pockets, no bull-terrier at my heels. Yet "'Oo," he asked of me, "'oo won the Big Fight?" I could hardly tell him in the circumstances: it would have been too delicate. But I remembered the lights and the gong and the leaning bodies and the incurious conjurer in evening dress, and presently from sheer force of habit (for I am a thoughtful man) I began to ask myself a question.

THE LOTUS EATER

IT WAS the first morning in the country; and the jaded townsman made a good breakfast. He made (since perfect candour is the note of the best modern autobiography) an exceptionally good breakfast. Then he went outside and looked at the sky, which looked back at him with a frank, open expression. It appeared to harbour none of those sinister designs which require such constant attention on the part of mankind. So he decided that it was safe to leave it for an hour or so and went indoors. There are few things more satisfactory than the act of going into the house and leaving fine weather on the grass outside. It has all the magnificent air of a rich man who has so much that he can afford to leave some of it about.

"This," he murmured to himself, "is the place for work. One can think here without interrupting the noise of the traffic. This quiet island of contentment" (and as he said that to himself, self complimented him on a graceful turn of phrase) "is what I have sought so long. Here flitting thoughts will visit me; deep re-

flections, impressive general statements upon human destiny will crowd upon a peaceful pen; and I may even (who knows?) achieve those higher qualities for which gentlemen who receive free copies of my works for review appear to yearn."

Deep in these pleasant thoughts, he filled his arms with books and retired to the farther corner of a large arm-chair. There was a charming dance of shadows on the carpet, as the big trees breathed lightly just outside the window; and he got to work. Eight minutes later a barking dog (did I say that he had a dog?) announced a caller. It was a large, uncertain man on a bicycle, who broke in upon the Eighteenth Century (did I say that he wrote about the Eighteenth Century?) and stated that he had come about a cistern. For weeks the agonised tenant had suffered from a cistern. For weeks by post-card, by letter, by stray messages he had urged the appropriate craftsman to attend his ailing cistern. But there had been no reply. Silence and a saturated floor appeared to represent the best that modern industrialism could do for the imperfect hydraulics of his cistern. And now, right in the middle of the Eighteenth Century, the artisan arrived.

He was a slow, explanatory man; and it took time to introduce him to his patient. But at length the presentation was effected, and the householder returned to his work.

On the way back he encountered two further industrialists, one with a hobby of repairing gate-posts and the other deep in the mystery of tiles. This double interview was protracted and complicated by the hopeless inapplicability of remarks intended for the one to the requirements of the other. Then he escaped to his arm-chair again.

As he sat down, he noticed that a pane or so of the window-glass was cracked. Someone, he remembered vaguely, had been instructed to remove the blemish. At that moment a face appeared beyond the window, and then a hand with a hammer. It struck the window smartly, and the glass fell outwards. "This," muttered the desperate householder, "is the place for work. Here flitting thoughts . . ." The crash of glass continued steadily. Undefeated by the alarming industrial activity of the countryside he wrote, with unaccustomed vividness, a description of the Gordon Riots—the crowds, the hammering, the harsh jangle of breaking glass. The din continued. "This quiet island of con-

tentment. . . ." He bit his pipe and shifted the focus of his study. "The King's reason" (he was writing now about George III) "reeled on its base." He analysed the dreadful dislocation with precision, with deep sympathy, with real human insight. He—but why anticipate? For you will read it one day.

P. E. N.[1]

OF COURSE it was a great occasion. It must have been, because at least five speakers said so—including the distinguished foreign gentleman, who went so far as to say it in his own language. Since we were the cream of Anglo-Saxon intellect, we all listened to him with that profound, that impenetrable air which people wear at a French play when they are watching their neighbours warily out of one corner of their eyes to see when to laugh. With that assistance (since we were only human) we cheered vociferously in the right places, and agreed with our eminent visitor that it was a great occasion.

Besides, it felt like one. There is something a little awe-inspiring about the thought of a great many writers gathered together in one room. The sense, as you look round, that each of those mild figures in evening dress is good for a thousand words before bed-time, the sudden vision of all the heroes, heroines, battles, murders, renunciations, *dénouements*, and epi-

[1] The *P. E. N.* Club, an international organization of writers.

logues, which lie potential inside those amiable heads, is a trifle alarming. It was rather like taking tea in a power-station. Editors were seen asking faintly for a little brandy and a blue pencil; and even publishers forgot to be proud.

It was, in all solemnity, a great assembly. Novelists of five nations stood about and interchanged dialogue—because dialogue, as we all know, is the novelist's substitute for conversation. Dramatists from half the capitals in Europe moved about in strict obedience to their own stage directions; and there was even a sinister hint, at which every eye became stern, that some critics had got in.

The notion at the back of it all was a sane one. Hoarse-voiced gentlemen on soap-boxes are perpetually inviting the workers of the world to unite. The response to their invitation is normally a trifle meagre. But the idea is good; and there is no reason why it should not be acted upon by members of other and more mobile callings. Of these the writer's is perhaps the most adaptable. One might hesitate, perhaps, to see the notion spread to some other professions. There would be something a little sinister about a cry of "Lawyers of the world,

unite!" And no great measure of popular sympathy would attend an international gathering of undertakers or police officials. But an assembly of writers is another story. Not, perhaps, a funny, but rather a slightly improving story.

In the first place, they are harmless. They would not (except in plays by Mr. Capek) hurt a fly. They have quite nice manners. And they play, although you never would think so to look at them, a considerable part in directing the thought of the countries in which they live. Any fool with a Parliamentary majority can make a war between two nations. But it takes the hard work of a good many pens to create a friendship. That is why friendly contract between writers is a useful thing.

Of course they are no better at expressing their high aims than anyone else. The platitudes of international peace and good-will sound as empty at a literary gathering as elsewhere, "Thought knows no frontiers . . . golden bridge of ideas . . . lion . . . lamb . . . bright dawn." Or if you prefer it with the rare distinction of a foreign language, "*Chers confrères . . . humanité . . . vers l'aurore.*" Any public speaker can do it with the easy gesture of a man turning on a tap. But the differ-

ence, when the familiar words are spoken by people with pens, is that they mean something, because the speaker has the power to turn the dream into a reality. In the modern world writers and (before the talkies) film-actors are the only performers with an international appeal. A combination of Mr. H. G. Wells, M. Anatole France, and Miss Mary Pickford could have reformed the earth.

But, of course, the real thrill of the gathering was that there were distinguished foreigners present. There is something pathetic about the eternal craving of the Briton for exotics. Give him a play, and he will stare languidly at it, stretch himself offensively in the second Act, and call loudly for a revue. But give him the same play, and assure him that it ran for two thousand nights in Bucharest and the author is warranted made in Moldavia, and a new, respectful expression will come into his eye.

It is his way with opera, with ballet, with the more dismal sorts of fiction. His dance-music must be written for him in Brooklyn, although it could be done just as badly in Shepherd's Bush. His dull novels must be composed in sight of a Russian steppe or a Norwegianfiord, although there are willing hands at home which

could write novels just as dull (and, if anything, a little longer) to compare with the worst work of the Slav and Scandinavian masters. There is a snobbery about these things, and it leads the simple Briton to look up absurdly to the imported work of art. Oddly enough, the foreign masters who are most admired in England are rarely known in their own countries. They have concentrated, so to say, on the export market; and in the result courteous Danes and anxious Frenchmen shake dubious heads when confronted by the cultured Anglo-Saxon with the names of their greatest writers.

The sphere of music has always been devastated by this imbecile prejudice. Were not our fathers—or rather, our grandmothers—driven to re-name themselves Squallini or Robinsoni, if they aspired to shine in opera? Indeed, I have sometimes suspected that our own twin native eminences, Holst and Elgar, owe their emergence in no small measure to their slightly exotic names. One feels, I mean, that the musical public took them on trust, hoping that they would turn out to be foreigners after all. And has not our own age witnessed a precisely similar development in the art of ballet, where success demands a Russian pseudonym and the

accomplished Miss Boot enchants us—but only on condition that the programme calls her Butsova?

Letters, perhaps, are the worst case of all. For one might reasonably expect a nation's literary taste to bear some relation to the frontiers of its own language. The French have shown an admirable example of complete and impenetrable insularity in such matters, blandly rejecting anything written more than sixty miles away from Paris, and retaining an adorable unawareness of any single name in English letters between the twin milestones of Byron and Conan Doyle. Not so the Island Race. Impelled by a morbid humility (or the doctrine of Free Trade), it persistently imports its masterpieces from abroad. For about a hundred years fashion has dictated that at any given moment all well-read Englishmen should know the name—and, possibly, have tried to read the works—of at least one Continental genius. They need not attempt him in the original; grasp of a fair translation will satisfy the examiners.

There is a whole dynasty of these invaders. Coleridge and, after him, Carlyle prescribed a course of German; Matthew Arnold altered the treatment to a dose of French; then the ice

melted in the Baltic, and heavy shipments of Russian novelists began to come forward. I have always thought that Slav fiction was the perfect case for closing the Dardanelles. And the odd thing about it all is that one season's masterpiece is hardly ever remembered into the next. Does anybody now read the interminable Romain Rolland, whose works were practically compulsory in cultivated circles just before the war? How many people will be reading Proust in 1931? And who remembers the name of that Italian genius who flashed across our stage only a year or so ago? Think for a minute. . . . It began with a P. . . . Let me help you—Pir—yes, Pirandello.

The visits are so brief that we can hardly get much good from them. They are not here much longer than the swallows; and they come to us so oddly dressed. Translation, I mean, is the very poorest of all vehicles for conveying any writer's meaning. (That must be why writers totally devoid of meaning are the most successful in translation.)

But there they all were; and we stared reverently. Here, distributed at little tables and responding patiently to anxious and repeated enquiries that they liked London and adored

Shakespeare, were the brains of Europe. One felt a little out of place.

Perhaps it is always a mistake to look at authors. Actors and politicians, one feels, are made to be stared at. Their ground-plans, so to speak, are carefully laid out with that one purpose in view. The elevation, the façade, the approach, all minister to the great impression. But with writers it is otherwise. Their life, their performances, their whole existence are on the printed page; and one always sees them in the flesh with the fierce furtive enjoyment of forbidden fruit. There is the little, wicked feeling of being behind the scenes, of seeing how it is all done, of watching the priest who works the miraculous image. These formidable figures are so harmless really. They halt in their after-dinner speeches in the same way as common men. And when they dance, they dance a little stiffly perhaps, but with the same gloomy resolution as the rest of the world. But it was a great occasion.

REGISTERED LUGGAGE

I AM undoubtedly in Portugal. Almost everybody except myself speaks Portuguese; and nothing comes when you ask for it. So this is, beyond all doubt, the happy territory of our oldest ally. His substantives end in—*ao;* his most explicit promises end in smoke; and if I were still inclined to doubt my whereabouts, conviction would reside in the strange case of my luggage. When last seen, it was in Lisbon, where the population showed a charming tendency to let off fireworks in the streets by broad daylight, either because they were glad that it was Sunday morning or in order to get into training for the next General Election. For a change of Government in this enlightened country is a thorough change. There is never the slightest risk of one of those depressing Cabinet shuffles with which we are so often put off; because here the late ministers are (literally and with black-edged note-paper) the late ministers.

But I wander from my luggage. And that, I fear, is precisely what the two trusted men did, who undertook to put it in the train at

Lisbon. Perhaps my senior mandatory went to get a shave. It was, to be perfectly frank, an appointment which he appeared to have postponed too long; and it may be that the spectacle of so much luggage from England, a country where all ladies are notoriously fair and most gentlemen exquisitely clean-shaven, reminded him that he had indeed delayed unduly.

Perhaps, in this sudden awakening to the proprieties, he took Time (apt metaphor) by the forelock and, leaving my luggage on the platform, did it now. At any rate, my luggage (how difficult it is to be relevant in a warm climate) did not come with me. The station was sympathetic, but unhelpful. The hotel, which (through its daughter) spoke a minimum of English with a maximum of charm, received my fevered instructions and, like a branch of the War Office in a national crisis, took no action.

But it is not for nothing that Portugal is Britain's oldest ally. Some of the errant luggage arrived three hours later in a cart. Not satisfied with this stupendous triumph of mind over matter, I went in quest of the balance. I went in quest of it to the railway station, where it was still Sunday afternoon.

Perhaps it was more profoundly Sunday afternoon in that railway station than in any other part of Europe. The station, reposing in its charming climate after its lunch, said that my luggage was not there. The traveller, with the arrogant dogmatism of a foreigner, retorted that he knew his luggage when he saw it and that those bags were it. Unruffled by this apparent check, the station replied with dignity that I had no paper authorising me to receive my property.

There was undoubtedly much justice in this observation; and the traveller was momentarily foiled. Then, with a sudden recollection of long years passed in the service of another Government, the traveller suggested that if the station would write out an order to itself to deliver the baggage to me, all might yet be right and in order. The station beamed. It wrote. It copied forms. It signed and countersigned and charged about eightpence for its labours.

Thus all was made clear, and the wandering baggage reunited with the rejoicing traveller. Not, one feels, for nothing has Portugal sat at the administrative feet of its traditional ally. I might have been in Whitehall.

ERIN GO BRAGH

THE tourist was a trifle dazed, not without reason. For he had been observing at a high rate of speed ever since the exciting moment when his steamer slid alongside the pier at Kingstown. (Would he never remember to efface the outrageous memory of King George IV and call it Dunleary?) That moment, though, had left a flavour in which Irish elements were oddly mixed with English. The recumbent hills first seen in the falling dusk of an October afternoon were Irish beyond question. Besides, the map reported them to be in Wicklow—and maps, at a safe distance from Continental frontiers, do not lie. But the railway station into which he looked from the still moving deck across an intervening strip of harbour was no less indisputably English.

Yet it was English with a difference; and the difference, if he could give it a name, lay in the delicious fact that it seemed to be an English railway station of about forty years ago. The comfortable air of 1888 lay close about it. One felt that Victoria was Queen once more

and Lord Salisbury was still her Prime Minister. There was about that station an almost sacramental atmosphere of long tradition, of all the jokes that *Punch* had ever printed about railway stations. Surely that porter in the peaked cap that was just too small for him was the very porter who had once pronounced unforgettably that cats was dogs and birds was dogs, but tortoises . . . Those dogs, too, in the corner over there—must they not just this moment have eaten their labels? And some cheerful passenger in that adorable little train, which magic beyond our understanding had recalled from the dead past, would surely inform a nervous fellow-traveller that her Bill *could* make her go when he had a drop in him.

The same air of a past miraculously recovered somehow hung about the little shops along the road to Dublin. For all the toys that he had ever coveted in 1894 seemed to be waiting for the tourist behind the lit enchantment of those windows; and he sat wondering if the same magic quest draws every British visitor to Ireland, if they all set off (as he involuntarily found himself) *à la recherche du temps perdu* and end in triumph with *le temps retrouvé*.

But hospitable hands ended these speculations. Whirled off on a triumphal round of art-galleries and cathedrals, he was soon more deeply engaged with Ireland's past than with his own. Not that Ireland seemed conspicuously interested in her past. There were the monuments, of course, preserved with intelligence and taste; and the bank-notes which gallantly united the ornament of the Book of Kells with the less traditional features of Lady Lavery; and the bilingual sign-posts, upon which an indomitable antiquarianism gladdens our eyes with Irish script. (Strange that when Turkey struggles bravely forward into the lit circle of comprehensible writing, Ireland should back no less strenuously out of it.) But, for the most part, students of the Irish past must seek it for themselves, since Ireland's mind is fixed very properly on Ireland's future.

Now, the wise tourist who desires to see the sights should always stare the way the crowd is staring; and this judicious principle took him one wet evening to the Dail. Respectful in a gallery, he heard the Free State legislating and wondered just how far Mr. Gladstone would have been gratified by this embodiment of the last of all his dreams. It had dignity, of course.

Not even the most fretful observer looking down upon that lovely carpet could deny it. Even if its denizens were disinclined to be dignified, the horse-shoe Chamber of Continental pattern seemed to impose it. But it was the simple dignity of public business soberly transacted rather than the more impressive attitudes of self-conscious Nationalism.

Perhaps it was not quite what Mr. Gladstone had expected. For here was nothing in the least resembling an expanded version of the old Nationalist Party playing upon a larger instrument in Leinster House. The tourist notes with disappointment (but the well-wisher of the Free State with deep satisfaction) an almost total absence of Milesian eloquence. There is, it seems, a wholesome fear of perorations. Business proceeds in the level tone in which Mr. Cosgrave and Mr. De Valera were arguing down there about the principles of city-government. It might positively have been a meeting of the Manchester City Council—and what better augury for Ireland?

But even as the drab debate proceeded, one could not quite forget who were the debaters. There at the corner, trim and competent behind his papers, sat Mr. Cosgrave, managing a dozen

neat replies and representing so unassumingly the martyrs of the Free State. For one could not quite forget Griffith, Collins, and O'Higgins as one watched him. Still less, perhaps, could one forget them as one looked across the floor at Mr. De Valera, learning to lead a Parliamentary Opposition. I have watched public men on many occasions, but none (I think) quite so unsmiling as Mr. De Valera. He was even capable of unbroken gravity in the midst of a laughing, talking knot of his own supporters in the division lobby. Does he ever joke? I cannot say. Mathematicians rarely do. That evening nothing was visible but a pinched mouth and two solemn, horn-rimmed eyes below the low fringe that seemed to indicate a tribute of tonsorial respect for Robert Emmet. Perhaps he was for too long the sacred emblem of the Republic to retain the more human qualities that make up political leadership. What actor, after all, could retain his gifts of facial expression after a long run in the *rôle* of Buddha?

But there was more in the Dail than Mr. Cosgrave and Mr. De Valera—a friendly welcome and a heartening sense of responsibility; a Government Whip who managed to keep smil-

ing, though his majority wavered between three and five; and a sense that here at last was a point to which all Irishmen might one day rally for the sake of Ireland. One was not sorry to have been a Home Ruler. But as the tourist walked out into the rain across the glistening pavement of Kildare Street, he felt a secret relief that no accident of English politics could ever send the least worthy of us to be Chief Secretary.

TRAFFIC

I HAVE been reading (it is as well to confess it frankly) the police news. Indeed the conductors of our great morning journals, in their wisdom, make it practically impossible for most of us to read anything else. Perhaps they know best. After all, one may be summoned to sit on a jury at almost any moment; and it is just as well to know whom to convict without the dreary necessity of listening to the evidence. For in criminal cases the descriptive writer has effectively superseded the Bench—and at a far lower cost to the community.

It was not, however, this lofty function of the Fourth Estate that engaged my wandering attention. It was the simple narrative of an isolated incident in Greater London which carries a more hopeful lesson and, emulated by others of sterner mould, may bring with it the bright dawn of a revolution that has been far too long delayed. Last week a gentleman in West Ham was fined ten shillings for the heroic act of standing in the road. When charged, he said (I quote his noble words) that he had a right

to be there. That was the simple eloquence of Hampden; and Hampden's fate was his. He was fined ten shillings. A more emotional community would have rewarded him. In France the Minister of Communications would probably have kissed him smartly upon both cheeks and appended the Legion of Honour. At Rome the Duce might well have relaxed for a moment that ferocious glare and raised the right hand vertically in a gesture of respect. But at the West Ham Police Court he was just fined ten shillings. One bows the head.

No doubt the Law was properly administered. It frequently is. But what a state of law that inflicts a fine upon a pedestrian for being in the road. I could have understood the conviction, if it had been a railway. Yet there was just the King's highway; and it cost one of His Majesty's subjects ten shillings to stand on it. It is not easy to say whether the injustice or the gallantry was greater. There—one can almost see the scene—was the road and its long line of grim machines. On the pavement a little band of pedestrians crept slowly past with white faces, watching the kerb with frightened eyes. One or two of their number clung in panic to a refuge in mid-stream; and on the farther

shore their homes, their children waited, stretching out anxious arms or wailing shrill advice above the din of the traffic. Sometimes a father, who could bear the strain no longer, threw himself out of safety under the waiting wheels. And then the hero, unknown (as yet) to the police, stepped quietly out and stood there. In a single instant the horrid scene was transformed. The dreadful engines stopped; angry faces glared above quivering radiators; and families, long separated from one another, met with little happy cries on the farther side. Then he was fined ten shillings.

We are often told there is a traffic problem. It is, apparently, the problem of how to get more traffic into the streets. Public servants (in white gloves) occasionally stop the traffic in order to let more traffic pass. But no one seems to trouble Ministers with the more pressing problem of the foot passengers. Those humble users of the road stand in the same peril as our whole society. For they are in danger of being crushed by the machinery. It ended in "R.U.R." with the destruction of the world by its vile mechanical creations; and there are few large towns where it does not seem likely to end in much the same way.

That is why I read with deep dismay of the conviction at West Ham. Where is the heart of England, where the drums, the banners, and the insurrectionary propaganda of the Amalgamated Society of Pedestrians? Mr. Saklatvala, please copy.

Critical

THOUGHTS IN SANCTUARY
(or Rima re-visited)

THE collective efforts of the Prime Minister, Mr. Jacob Epstein, and Mr. Cunninghame Graham, supported (as dramatic critics say) by an influential and representative committee, has released the Silly Season eight weeks or so before its time. One is prepared for this kind of thing in August, when tactful editors replace the more disturbing forms of news with really sedative controversy. "Should Girls . . . ?" "Do Bishops . . . ?" "Can a Dean . . . ?" These eager questions waft us to the seashore. One can almost catch the languid flop of summer waves. The sand is in our shoes; the unyielding shingle conforms inadequately to our shoulderblades; the air is cheerful with the cries of children coming up for the second time.

But here it comes in May, one more symptom of the senseless craving of our age for hurry. "Mother of Nine" enquires from Walham Green what art is coming to. "R.A." in sterner tones, tells her where it has gone, and

obligingly appends a list of his principal works. Jocose reporters crouch behind trees to record the conversations of startled nursemaids. A Park policeman is prevailed upon to vouchsafe his impressions to a wider public; while several architects of that restless type, which aches perpetually to perform Olympic feats of town-planning by throwing Charing Cross Station across the river, find glorious pretexts in this innocuous health-resort for sparrows.

Yet how few, in the sudden uproar, have alighted on the real point for congratulation. It leaps to the eye, though Mr. Baldwin was restrained by tact from alluding to it at the unveiling. For one observes with glee that there is hardly any sculpture. There might, of course, be less. But it is only just to remember that there might equally be more.

When first one heard obscurely that a distinguished writer was to be commemorated, one winced and thought of marble trousers. Military men protect themselves against this posthumous form of ridicule by adopting a style of leg-wear that defies the worst excesses of the sculptor. Spurs and riding boots are not ignoble; they seem to retain their shape, even in studios. But plastic tailoring is pitiless with

civilians. Disdaining braces, they sag precariously in crowded streets; although the most perilous cases have sought refuge in the Central Lobby of the House of Commons. But when forced into the open, they seemed to adopt the oddest disguises. George Canning emerges perpetually into Parliament Square from his eternal Turkish bath, though next to him the quaintly trousered form of Lincoln exhibits to the full the sartorial recklessness of a New World. Fearing the sculptured trouser, Disraeli shrouds himself in a peer's robes; and just across the way Lord Palmerston extends a railway-rug at posterity in a perpetual, mute request to wrap him up. Some, indeed, prefer to end below the shoulders in a square pedestal and a symbolical lady; and far down the Embankment Sir Joseph Bazalgette, warned by the neighbouring fate of Brunel, conceals himself in one of his own largest drain-pipes and lies full-length to watch the trams go by.

That fate, which overhung the memory of Hudson, has been averted. He does not stoop, life-size, to press a bronze flower between the adamantine leaves of a bronze book or sit perpetually, pen in hand, groping through all eternity for the right word. He even escaped

the milder torment, to which our sentence on the dead is often commuted, of staring in profile on a medallion like an eternal parody of a half-crown. One feels that, on the whole, we have been merciful with Hudson. His spirit is, as it were, let off with a caution. Other offenders may be dealt with more severely, like Burns, who got the maximum penalty—for writing in dialect, no doubt. But the Prime Minister or Mr. Epstein or Mr. Cunninghame Graham has been almost compassionate with Hudson.

Not that the risks would have been smaller in any foreign capital. Discussion of our monuments invariably provokes an ill-timed burst of national humility. But monuments are just as funny abroad. In Germany, of course, the dead writer would have been popped into some huge Valhalla, with a warning by Baedeker (*Adm.* 10–5. *Guardian* 1 *Mk.*) against visiting it without wraps after sundown. He might even, had he worn spectacles in life, have retained them, like Herr Friedrich Krupp in his eternity of myopia outside the Yacht Club at Kiel. One might suppose that men of letters die happier in France. But they can foresee, if they know their Paris, a dismal prolongation of their

existence in a frock-coat of lambent marble on an uncomfortable marble seat. Perhaps they will droop a little, and a merciful rug spread on the failing legs may spare them the worst. But a large, sorrowing lady will trail along the ground, slightly immodest but extremely allegorical; whilst the cruel marble restrains through all eternity the writer's chivalrous impulse to lend her his rug.

But there is a graver feature. A gifted writer upon nature dies; and we enclose a small slice of nature in his honour. Is it, one asks a little nervously, to be a precedent? We have commemorated Hudson's prose with a railing round a fragment of Hyde Park. Are we to honour Conrad's with a railing (rustless) round a small segment of the Serpentine? One can almost see the scene—a respectful company in boats, while kindly hands on shore air blankets at the Royal Humane Society's. The voices come faintly across the water, as the Minister of Agriculture and Fisheries dedicates this charming fish-sanctuary to the memory of an aquatic writer, upon whom his private secretary has furnished him with the relevant facts. And then a mild controversy in the Press as to the

suitability of someone's colossal nude of Venus rising from the Serpentine.

Soon the whole Park will bristle with names and dates. Lovers will meet by George Meredith (squirrels) or at Cunninghame Graham (the large horse sanctuary near Hyde Park Corner); and the Park, the old, uninforming, incommemorative Park, will be a faded memory of vulgar grass and trees, wholly devoid of literary associations.

Have we not reached a point at which the public foot might be, quite reverently but quite firmly, put down? We have preserved the Park for people, not for statues. Field-Marshals ramp outside. Prime Ministers who know their place remain at Westminster. And if our men of letters insist upon admission, let us concede to them one simple stone inscribed "To the Unknown Writer." From what I know of literary men, there will be little competition.

THE DEATH OF THE NOVEL

THE critic leads a hunted life: his bitterest enemy could scarcely wish him a worse one. Pursued from dawn to dusk by the mounting tide of new publications, he has little time for the leisurely examination of those general questions which are the salt of criticism. For mass-production keeps him far too busy appraising the last masterpiece (or, perhaps, the last but one) of the very latest master. If I had the power, I would proclaim a moratorium for publishers. We should not lose much. If it ran into a month, I suppose we might miss a trilogy by Mr. Edgar Wallace and Herr Ludwig's life of a world-figure or so. But think of our reward. The other side of the account would surely be crowded to our advantage. For the blest interval would give the critics time to turn round, to find themselves, to refresh those jaded palates with which, in their present sad condition, it must be almost impossible for them to perform the delicate functions of a public taster.

That is why it is occasionally a healthy thing

to interrupt the stream of daily criticism addressed to particular books with a general question on the state of letters. Let me suggest one. If someone asked suddenly, "What is the leading branch of English letters?" you would almost infallibly reply, "The novel." And, on the face of it, there would be a good deal to support your answer. For the novel, judged by many tests, must still appear to be the leading mode, the Leviathan on the flood of English letters. If you walk into any book-shop in the land and ask the assistant for a book *pur et simple*, it is ten to one that he will hand you a novel; for that is what he (and, still more indubitably, she) understands by a book. So with relations, editors, and stray conversationalists in hotel lounges, all of whom almost infallibly regard any confessed author as a writer of fiction.

And, I am bound to admit, the figures appear to go a long way in support of their view. I have not yet before me the returns for the current year. But I hold in my hand (as politicians always say, as though it were a feat of immense difficulty—perhaps it is, for them) the figures for 1926; and these are sufficiently terrifying. For out of a total of 12,799 new

publications for the year, no less than 2,964 were novels. That is to say, roughly one new book in every four is a novel, an alarming state of things for which the only consolation must be the healing thought that every one of them is printed on extremely perishable paper.

This gloomy statistic might appear to provide a somewhat insecure foundation for a cautious hint that possibly the day of the English novel is drawing towards evening. But look closer at the enormous volume of new novels—this more than Mississippi flood, on the surface of which Mr. Michael Arlen rides a coronet, while Miss Sheila Kaye-Smith swirls past clinging bravely to a hen-coop—and you will detect certain disquieting symptoms. For one sign of supremacy is absent from the English novel in our own day, and one sign of failing health is ominously present: the best work is being done by novelists of the older generation. When an art-form is at the crest, its best practitioners are not all on the wrong side of fifty. Neither English poetry in 1810 nor verse-drama under Elizabeth was produced by an impressive row of *doyens*. Yet that, or something like it, is very nearly the state of things prevailing in English fiction to-day. The great names and the star

performers are still the names that decorated the programmes of 1910; and the rising young novelists of the years before the war are still, alas, rising young novelists. Can it mean that there is a weakening of the pulse of English fiction? I rather think so.

One is so apt to assume that an art-form goes on for ever. Yet our tracks are covered with the whitening bones of dead art-forms. Who sits down this year to write an epic poem—at any rate, with any hope of seeing it in print? Yet there was a time when any intelligent observer of English letters would have received with complete incredulity the scandalous suggestion that at some future date there would not be a single man of letters engaged upon a trifle chastely entitled *The Day of Judgment*, or even upon a little thing in twelve Books called *The Fall of Palmyra*. Epic has gone—by no means never to return but, for the moment, gone. So has verse tragedy. Yet if you had told an Elizabethan that the day would come when he might rake the attics of London in vain to find a single figure crouched over a heap of blackened manuscript and inscribing his last page lovingly "*Act VII and last—The Torture Chamber*," he would have laughed wildly and

strode confidently off to the theatre to cleanse his mind from the absurd suggestion. But verse tragedy has gone. So, in another art, has oratorio. And opera, to resume the catalogue of dying industries once intoned by the late Joseph Chamberlain with gloomy satisfaction, is going; since it drags out a precarious existence supported by the subsidies of wealthy people and imposed by them upon a suffering proletariat, which will very properly begin the Social Revolution by burning down the opera houses.

So it is unsound to conclude that because an art-form lives, it will never die; and I suggest to lovers of the novel that they should give due consideration to the sinister fact that the best work to-day is being done by the older writers. The pre-eminence of Hardy owed nothing to the automatic gesture of respect that we all pay to mummied age; it was a genuine superiority. So was Conrad's. Equally pre-eminent is Mr. H. G. Wells or Mr. Arnold Bennett or Mr. Galsworthy or (in his particular mode) Mr. George Moore. The older men will, of course, always have the more skilful hands; but if the art is drawing its due measure of support from the rising generation, the

seniors will not tower quite so immeasurably above the rest. I suggest, therefore, that something is happening to English fiction. I mean, of course, serious English fiction. Nothing in this gloomy diagnosis has reference to that form of writing (if it is really written, and not assembled by some neat mechanical device) which is believed by the bookstalls to enliven railway journeys and is a means of livelihood rather than a form of art. For you will never stop that type of novelist from writing—any more than you will stop an errand-boy from whistling in the street.

But, on any careful scrutiny of the English novel, one fact seems to distinguish our own day from the age which ended with the War, although some of its eminences are still happily amongst us. For the greater part of the Nineteenth Century and the first decade of the Twentieth the novel was so predominant as an art-form that anybody with anything to say on any subject almost infallibly said it in fiction. When Dickens conceived opinions upon Chancery reform, he presented them in the form of *Bleak House*. Charles Reade's convictions on the Reformation appeared as *The Cloister and the Hearth*. Mr. Wells's problems in sociology

dropped automatically into the form of stories. Even Conrad's admirable study of a Latin American republic became *Nostromö*. It would almost appear as though anyone with anything to say on any theme said it in fiction. That is the one sure sign of the supremacy of any art-form; and when it ceases to impose itself upon the people with something to say, its supremacy begins to wane.

Can we detect in the present condition of the novel any indication of such a waning? I rather think so. Look closely at the newer names in English fiction, and you will find that almost all of them have very little to say outside their story. The novel, that is to say, is falling back into the hands, from which it started, of the pure artists. The people with other things to say are saying them in other forms. Born sixty years ago, Mr. J. B. S. Haldane would almost infallibly have couched his speculations on the future in the form of scientific romances. Mr. J. M. Keynes might even have set his economics to a tune of fiction. But now they say what they have to say in the varying forms of essay, article, and treatise, leaving fiction to the story-tellers. I am inclined to doubt whether, if Mr. Wells had been born in 1880, he would have

written novels at all; indeed, he tends less and less to do so. It almost looks as though the tide is changing.

The invented story satisfies an eternal human craving and, therefore, it will endure. But it by no means follows that all forms of argument and instruction must inevitably be conveyed in the form of fiction. In the early years of the Nineteenth Century the English novel was in the hands of story-tellers, whether the stories that they told were Scott's or Miss Austen's. Then, from a complex of different causes, partly personal and partly social, came the submergence of all forms of English prose by novel-writing. Reformers, sociologists, even historians, all turned novelists; and in the years between 1840 and 1914 English prose literature (apart from a handful of historians, who still survived) was bounded on the north, south, east, and west by the frontiers of the novel. I half suspect that age to be drawing to a close under our eyes. The novel seems to be returning to the hands of story-tellers, whether their stories are the full-dress fiction of Miss Margaret Kennedy, the fantasies of Mr. Huxley, or the dreary *cochonneries* with which Mr.

James Joyce detains a slowly emptying smoking-room.

The rest of English writers, those who have something more than a mere tale to tell, have drifted into other forms. Historians write history now; students of social discontent write books upon *The Village Labourer*, instead of calling him John Smith and launching him upon a course of fictitious adventure. The change, most likely, is a healthy one, because the tendency has been spontaneous and, therefore, natural. The craft of English fiction was more than a little overloaded; and it was time, perhaps, to lighten the cargo. But as it sails on, it is just as well to recognise the change and to observe that the novel does not tower quite so menacingly above us all as it did twenty years ago. The old supremacy is gone, and perhaps the novel is the gainer by its going. *Le roi est mort*—at least I hope so—*vive le roi!*

WEEK-END

DEDICATED
WITH PROFOUND RESPECT
TO
REGULAR READERS
OF
THE WEEK-END BOOK

IT WAS rather a trying party. One had feared as much at the station, where they emerged from the 4:18 with far too little luggage and far too much noise. They had, it seemed, been having Frightful Fun all the way down from London with Up-Jenkyns and Consequences and Animal Grab and what not. Our hearts sank a little; and the old gentleman in the corner of their carriage looked visibly relieved. But then he was not a Week-Ender.

There was, from the first, a determined jolliness, a frigid and calculated gaiety, a geniality strained to breaking-point. "This," they exclaimed, as they saw the garden, "is gaudy." "But this," they vociferated as the cottage came in sight, "is gaudier still." We agreed, when it

was all over, that they appeared to have ordered their slang at Heal's.

But their literature (and they carried lots and lots of it in their heads) was infinitely more modish. It all came out just after tea, before we could get them started out on a short walk; and it had the staggering effect of a mannequin parade. No author who had been worn before the summer season of 1924 was mentioned. Indeed, there were several who, it was whispered, were to be the new autumn models. There was Donn and Dryden and Suckling and Marvell and Blake and Mrs. Cornford and a duck of a *motif* with just a suggestion of the old-world crinoline of Christina Rossetti. Henry Vaughan (in nun's veiling) and Gilbert Chesterton (a pannier effect) were there; nor were the bustle and leg-of-mutton sleeves of a graceful poetess *fin-de-siècle* absent.

But that, perhaps, was not the worst. After dinner (at which they found a deplorable absence of tinned foods) they fell to roaring catches. To the folk-song movement and the revival of "The Beggar's Opera" and the patient excavation of maritime chanties we owe a lamentable tendency on the part of genteel persons to roar catches. They are, for the most

part, anæmic, mildly tuneful ditties, in which a tinkling air accords strangely with the riotous sentiments expressed in the *libretto*. Of these they seemed to know far, far too many. A natural diffidence as to their powers of conversation appeared to have led them to accumulate an inexhaustible store; and with vast reserves of melody still splashing in their widow's cruse they stumped merrily off to bed.

By the great mercy of heaven they had thought of nothing bright to do in the night. One might have feared apple-pie beds and shrieks of laughter, or jugs on top of bed-room doors and muffled giggles. But their engaging repertory of organised felicity stopped, fortunately, short. In the morning, however, Innocent Merriment broke out again. They played games with gruesome pertinacity which would have done credit to a party of ill-assorted civilians in an internment camp. They thought of a number with tears of laughter. They doubled it with shaking sides. They named, with happy gurgles, three inventors beginning with X. They fell exuberantly to dreadful little games with matches and beans and bits of paper. And since they seemed quite happy, we left them in the house and went for a walk.

The fields, indifferent to the habits of the figure 9, were green; unconcerned by Consequences, the trees were still; the birds wheeled slowly, untroubled by the names of deceased statesmen beginning with the rarer letters of the alphabet. But as we came home again shrill cries of "Perfectly splendid" floated down the wind. One of them was asking for a copy of the "Great Bible" and a box of matches. Jollity, it seemed, was still in progress. The Reign of Fun continued until Monday morning; and as they scrambled vociferously into the London train, the blessed calm of the country invaded us. For the Week-End was over.

THE GIFT OF TONGUES

THERE is really something rather impressive about the Englishman abroad. That wife, those tweeds, that massive air of utter incomprehension all unite to keep the foreigner in his place. The little creatures exhibit their landscapes and their historical curiosities with a wealth of explanation and even of gesture. They indicate the homes of kings, the scenes of famous crimes, the tombs of emperors. But the Englishman and his family continue to stare impassively at an advertisement on the wrong side of the street.

In frontier towns the hopeful natives even assume a wealth of martial panoply in order to impress him with the heinousness of smoking his own tobacco. But he stands stolidly at ease while they fiddle with his shirts, blandly offering his passport to the ticket-collectors and a railway ticket to anyone who asks to see his passport. It is an effective attitude, which repels alike the importunities of guides and the vexation of that numerous bureaucracy, by the creation of which the more agile intelligence of

Continental nations appears to have solved t
problem of unemployment. Besides, it has
peculiar dignity of its own, and it repels aw
ward conversation. The high hopes and pred
tory appetites of innumerable foreigners ha
drooped and faded before the slow dawning
an irresistible fear that the Englishman ca
not understand a word that they are sayin
Behind this impenetrable air the British subje
stalks securely about the Continent. Like Lo
Nelson at Copenhagen, he turns a blind eye
every attraction, a deaf ear to every convers
tional opening.

But how different, how sadly inferior h
mien when the Continent, by some accident
theatrical enterprise, comes to England. The
(one is always noticing it) he exhibits a po
tively pathetic eagerness to understand. He s
in strained attitudes in the stalls and catch
with the wildest, most sudden cachinnations
any cue for laughter given by an obligi
aborigine in the gallery, who really understan
what the joke is about. He curves a recepti
hand behind one ear, as though the obstacle
a foreign language were some impediment
the hearing which might be overcome by e
travagant auricular precautions. (This, as y

will have noticed, is one of the most cherished illusions of the Island Race: they always raise their voices when talking English to a foreigner, in the faint hope that if it is only loud enough, the poor idiot will understand.)

At any rate the British tradition prescribes a queer taste for these peculiar theatrical occasions. The arrival of some Continental "star" on these shores is an occasion for solemn jubilation. Parties are formed to escort and fortify one another at the performances. Seats are engaged at more than ordinary cost; and instructors of foreign languages work overtime, preparing playgoers for the grave ordeal. Inside the theatre there is a respectful hush. By an unwritten convention all dictionaries are left at home; but the majority of the audience find the programme easier to translate than they had feared. There is no orchestra; but when the rise of the curtain is announced by a sudden sinister suggestion of giants putting up pictures in the next room, most of us have learned not to look surprised, because the rise in the cost of incidental music has driven many of our native entertainers to rely instead upon the less expensive effect of the *trois coups*.

Then the show begins. The tense islanders

hold their breaths and listen hard. Heavens, how they listen! And how little (since most foreign actors speak disgracefully fast—faster even than railway porters at Calais), how very little of it they catch. Yet when the curtain falls and the lights come up, they walk out into the street with a lighter, prouder step. Have they not seen the incomparable Someone in his or her most incomparable part? Did it not say so on the programme? And have they not read in last week's paper what the play was all about?

It is a queer enjoyment. But it is perfectly genuine. Perhaps it contains a strong ingredient of snobbery, of that aimless spirit of the collector which tempts innocent people to sit through unspeakably dreary spectacles because it is their feeble-minded ambition to *have* seen them. That is why so many apparently normal men go down coal-mines or to the Handel Festival.

But there is, one feels, more in it than that. Perhaps they find their pleasure in the relief of watching a play without the cerebral trouble of understanding all the talk. The same feeling has driven many a weary playgoer to seek refuge in the merely optical drama of the films. And it is possible that more than half a British

audience finds in a foreign play the enjoyment of a film with living actors. Indeed, it is better than the films; because one escapes the incessant annoyance of those enormous flickering manuscripts in which film-characters obligingly convey their emotions to one another in case we had failed to grasp them from their rolling eyes and fevered gestures.

One cannot deny that these queer outbreaks in foreign languages are an established feature of the English stage. It has lasted for several generations. It even lasted for the lifetime of Mme. Sarah Bernhardt. Yet one has never heard that the Continent displays a reciprocal interest in the achievements of Anglo-Saxon drama. Paris is not *en fête* when Mr. Godfrey Tearle's steamer reaches mid-Channel. No crowds storm box-offices in Amsterdam at a bare hint of Miss Gladys Cooper's presence in their midst. Almost the sole exception to this lamentable indifference is the Legion of Honour which the Third Republic conferred (and how discriminatingly) upon Little Tich.

But in England the foreign play is a national institution. Eighty years ago the foreign concert was the same; the young lady who desired a respectful hearing from her fellow-country-

men artfully added an ——ini to her native Tomkins. A later generation demanded (and still demands) that all dancers should be Russian, with the pleasing result that every Jones sprouts its alluring ——ova.

Perhaps the same tendency will overwhelm the stage. Ingenious managements may introduce neglected native favourites to an eager public by the simple device of a foreign name and a Special Season. Up, then, will go the maroons of critical appreciation. Up, too, the prices of seats. And we should all flock to see. But care must be taken. They must remember to speak indistinctly, or we might understand what the play is about. And that, on these grave occasions, would never do.

SILLY SEASON

THE slow movement of the stars, which determines such matters as the day of the week, the date of our holidays, and the recurring appearances of actor-managers for their Farewell Performances, is bringing us gradually nearer to one of the most significant portions of the English year. Public attention has been riveted hitherto on the proceedings of Parliament, which are sometimes rather touching, or on those impressive demonstrations of sartorial loyalty to Eton (or Harrow), which are more touching still, since they emanate almost entirely from persons who were not educated at Harrow (or Eton).

After a brief interlude towards the end of the month, in which anxious sub-editors will describe a photograph of two railway porters as "Holiday Rush: Scenes," the organised intelligence of these islands will settle down to its annual struggle with topics of a more general character. For it is customary at this season of the year, when the news is beginning to wear a little thin, for someone to discover something.

Indeed, a census of discoveries would probably disclose the pleasing circumstance that they were all, with inconsiderable exceptions, revealed to mankind during the holiday season. Did not Franklin fly his kite into the lightning on a summer day? Was not the apple which taught Newton his immortal lesson a ripening (and therefore a summer) apple? Even Columbus deferred to this immemorial practice, although (excusably, perhaps, under the trying circumstances of ocean travel) he was a trifle late and only succeeded in discovering America in October.

These revelations, which related in a simpler generation to the more inconvenient varieties of natural phenomena, have tended in our own time to become increasingly complicated. For us there is a slightly hollow ring in the marine monsters, the gigantic vegetables, the irrefutable evidence of a lost Atlantis (marshalled in several quite scholarly letters by enthusiasts in country vicarages), which used to delight our fathers. Our own demands are, somehow, more complex—a Reynolds in an attic near King's Cross or a folio Shakespeare under the defective leg of a grand piano in a country house near Perth. And once, with the precision of the

punctual sea-serpent, an Italian gentleman obliged by discovering the lost books of Livy. The moment was exquisitely chosen. A thousand beaches echoed with eager discussion of his find. A hundred sub-editors, relieved from the long agony of waiting for a headline, rang up penurious classicists with a curt but incisive demand for five hundred words on "What Livy Has to Say to Us." The news was disturbing in two oddly different quarters. Disgust among persons under sixteen was universal. But a mild sensation of alarm pervaded the teacher as well as the taught. Quite a lot of most distinguished people were haunted with an awkward feeling that they were shortly going (in the most blameless way, of course) to lose their reputations. Those brave assertions, that unanswerable conclusion which had earned a Fellowship, the argument that awed the Common Rooms in '85—whole hosts of this agreeable sort of thing might be swept unmercifully into limbo. And how pleasant to hear the learned men preparing for the quarrel. It was really worth it, if only for the spectacle of scurrying scholarship and the welcome sound of historians turning in their graves.

But it all came to nothing. Perhaps the bold

discoverer discovered just a shade too much. For his bag included a contemporary life of Christ as well; and, gloriously launched, his voyage ended in disaster. We can hardly hope to do quite so well this year. There will only be the old, old questions.

For some mysterious reason, of which the secret resides deep in the *penetralia* of British journalism, it is a settled belief that our countrymen, when on holiday, are devoured by an irrational desire to find the answers to the oddest questions. And, by a pleasing coincidence, it recurs punctually at the season when news is short. Thus, at the time of year when the mental activity of most Englishmen is divided between the allied problems of deciding when to bathe and finding out what time the London papers arrive, they are popularly believed to ache with a gnawing, an irresistible uncertainty as to whether School-girls Know Too Much or even whether Tennis-skirts are Long Enough. At this season those curious topics share with Alpine fatalities and boating accidents the honours of publicity; and every father who desires to retain the respect of his children is expected to compose (with the pale ink

of the British lodging-house) a considered judgment on the subject.

Prominent in this array of odd conundrums there will be one (if I may anticipate events) which will excite especial fervour. Soon after the August Bank Holiday a provincial Prebendary will leap into momentary fame by expressing himself freely on the subject of modern dancing. He will have a good deal to say upon the comparative blamelessness of the Polka, the Barn-dance, and even the Schottische; and he will advert with some severity to the undesirability of selecting the coloured races as models of ball-room deportment. This hero will be followed into publicity by two members of local Watch Committees and a retired mayor of some forgotten health-resort who, although separated by some hundreds of miles from the cathedral city that had excited the original complaint by its nameless orgies, had noticed it for themselves.

The ball will then be, as they say, set rolling; and I trust that by giving this preliminary indication of its probable course I am not depriving holiday-makers of the keen enjoyment which they will derive from this controversy next August.

Almost before the echoes of the first scandalised ejaculations have died away, "Two Business Girls" and "Father of Eight" will leap into the breach with fully reasoned defences of modern dancing, the former on the ground that, in their drab lives, dances—superior in this respect to whist drives, and even to Sacred Concerts—are full of agreeable social possibilities; the latter on the less convincing pretext that they afford good exercise, which young and old alike can. . . . The controversy will then be lifted to a higher plane by "Lover of Music" (writing from an address at Biggleswade), who will assert without fear of contradiction that no reputable composer of the past would have consented to mutilate his melody by the introduction of the meaningless hiatus known as syncopation or to include among his band-parts sheets indicating the appropriate moments for intervention by the motor-horn, the tin can, or even for brisk moaning noises by the orchestra itself.

At that stage the dogs of war will be fairly loose; and towards the fifth day of the discussion it will have definitely established itself as a part of the intellectual life of Great Britain. If Parliament is still sitting, someone will prob-

ably ask a supplementary question about it, arising out of an answer by the Colonial Office on the subject of native conditions in Trinidad; and the icy silence which greets it will be dutifully recorded as "(laughter)."

But the principal reverberations of the controversy will be confined to the newspapers. Most of the shorter letters will be those favourable to the impugned practice, because people who like dancing just write and say so. But there will be one or two fuller vindications from the pen of "Terpsichore" (Hammersmith) and "Dancing Instructor," in which adepts will be relieved to discover that the most characteristic features of contemporary practice may all be traced to classical models, and that this, if only we would realise it, is exactly the manner in which the Greek Chorus danced during the production of tragedies by Euripides. (All attempts to draw Professor Gilbert Murray into the discussion at this point will prove unsuccessful.) From time to time some Savonarola of the suburbs will add fuel to the fire by a burning denunciation of "this insensate craze which, coupled with high taxation and an obstinate refusal to provide a reasonably efficient telephone service, is driving our coun-

try . . . dark future . . . our girls and women . . . from her place among the nations." Then, as the letters pour in and the argument drifts further and further from the point, we shall feel the happy certainty that England is England still.

It is a part of our unwritten constitution that, at least once a year, this orgy of irrelevance should rage in the public Press. It ventilates an infinite quantity of personal anecdote which might otherwise overload the conversation of the sufferers. And it serves the further valuable purpose of demonstrating how much better the papers would be written if they were composed by the public. For, journalistically, it is a sort of annual Gentlemen v. Players. But sooner or later—never too late for me—the tourney ends. Something begins to happen somewhere in the world and a rueful editor proclaims, "Time, gentlemen, please."

THE FILM, THE BROW, AND THE FAN

I SUPPOSE that every age has its own particular spoil-sport. "Merrie England" was infested by a peculiar figure with a conical hat and an inexhaustible fund of Scriptural quotation. The gambols of the Great Victorians were frequently interrupted by the remarkable silhouette of Mr. Pecksniff. And our own age is not entirely exempt from such invasions. But, for the most part, our monitors are of another type. Our own particular scourge is the Intellectual. He is the ever-present fly in our ointment, the ubiquitous nigger in our fence. For he sees, he always sees, that we do not enjoy ourselves too much.

Indeed, the Intellectual's claim to this sombre distinction can scarcely be denied. For, beyond all controversy, he has a peculiar aptitude for spoiling sport. His touch can annihilate your pleasure in the simplest things. Take Russian literature. Here was a natural source of the purest and most innocent enjoyment. Funny to start with, translation always managed to make

it still funnier. Families might rock for days in simple merriment over the exquisite imbecility of Russian fiction. There was no need for dangerous stimulants like Professor Leacock, when we had Andreiev. But the Intellectual, lurking like a serpent in the Garden, deliberately spoiled our fun. He explained with unshakeable solemnity that Russian novels had a Message or an Outlook or something (if he happened to be American, he called it a Slant). He smudged the bright horizons of our laughter with the dreary sweep of his explanations. He analysed. He commented. He spoilt it all. And with what result? Our laughter died within us. We scarcely ventured to raise our eyebrows, as the delirious author reeled riotously from suicide to suicide in an ecstasy of *Weltschmerz*. The most uproarious catastrophes had somehow lost their power to move us to a smile. We were afraid that somebody might catch us smiling. For the Intellectual had put his fear into us, and had succeeded (it is his dearest ambition) in making one more entertainment unbearable. Why, this very year an enterprising publisher is to present us with an unpublished work of Tolstoy. It is to bear the uproarious title of *The Contaminated Family*

—and nobody will venture on so much as a smile.

That source of fun is, I fear, lost beyond redemption. But I regard it as little short of a public duty to defend another form of entertainment from the solemnising grip of the Intellectual. For he has—I know he has—designs upon one of the few foolish things that still remain to us in this lamentable world.

Need it be stated that I mean the films? For quite a few years now we have stolen a delicious pleasure in the glorious ineptitude, the adorable futility, the perfect foolishness of nearly everything connected with this form of entertainment. Sometimes, of course, it meant to be extremely funny, and was. But far more often nothing was farther from its mind than being funny—and it was funnier still. Nothing could touch the comedy of some screen comedians and of almost all screen *tragédiennes*. It was a genuine delight. One was sure of a good laugh, whether the poster at the door said "Fun Among the Dustbins" or "The Last Throw."

It was—I suppose one ought to have realised it—too good to last. The Intellectuals were bound to find us out. Guilty of a smile, we had incurred their dark suspicions; and they de-

scended on the movies with the swoop of a vulture on a decomposing camel. They began quietly at first, with dreary little essays on "The Art of Mr. Chaplin," or "Expressionism and the Screen." Then they launched out more boldly; and an estimable Society began to perform for the films that melancholy function which is performed for the drama by play societies. They showed on Sunday nights; they exhumed ancient films with a pleasant air of connoisseurship; they solemnised. Now, the theatre may derive some benefit (though just how much has always been obscure to me) from the dismal ritual of Sunday nights. But the films seem infinitely far removed from exercises of this type. When I hear a highbrow distilling his anæmic ecstasies over the art of some master of the back-fall, I am so painfully reminded of the little masters of the Nineties maundering over Marie Lloyd and the heroes of the Halls.

But there is every hope that the films will elude their perilous embraces. For it will not be easy to introduce an intellectual leaven into that glorious lump. Has it not got an intellect of its own? You may not have noticed it. But closer students will have observed a recent symposium of film stars on their favourite reading;

and I defy any Intellectual to scan it without a sinking of the heart, a sad conviction that here, at least, is one patch of human existence that is immune from his sinister activities.

The glorious page was headed "What do the Players read?"—although some of their answers might lead one to omit the "what." It opened with a slightly diffident lady, who confessed a trifle coyly to reading at all. "More and more," she said, "Shakespeare is becoming a favourite; I could not fully understand him at first." Such diffidence, however, did not hamper a second charmer, who confessed more boldly: "I favour French and English authors—John Masefield, George and Gustav Flaubert"—you remember George, of course, the elder Flaubert; and Gustav, the powerful young German stylist of the family. But she closed on a still higher note: "In Ovid's epigrams," she said, "I find much truth tersely and pertinently presented." *Ave, Hollywood, morituri te salutamus.*

The men were less engaging, except perhaps the shrewd actor who felt "sure of value received for time spent in perusing such verse as that of Keats and Browning . . . or the highly imaginative and potentially prophetic

writings of H. G. Wells. I prefer irrefutable logic to fiction junk." Not so, it would appear, his colleague, who intimates that "Dickens, for his quaint characters and his charm of style, and O. Henry for his vitality and ingenuity, are the most highbrow authors I read."

But the pearl of this strange chaplet is Miss Pola Negri. I have admired this lady in many contexts, but never among her books—and I am not quite so sure that I do now. "I am," she cried, "and I trust pardonably, proud of my library, for it contains five thousand volumes, compiled after years of study. Many of my books are in three, and some in four, languages, and they represent the best of the literature of all ages." (I vow this is a faithful transcript—I have not tampered with Miss Negri's text.) "The most interesting in my collection is a German Bible of the sixteenth century. . . . Another that I value highly and find engrossing details Roman military tactics. It is from the famous old Elzevir Press and was printed in 1610."

You had not expected to find Miss Negri poring over Vegetius, had you? Neither had I. But after that you will scarcely be surprised to find her travelling by way of Heine to Tolstoy

and Dostoievski. So the Intellectual can keep his notions to himself. For the movies are quite sufficiently intellectual already for me and Miss Pola Negri.

GIGANTIC DAUGHTER

REALLY, there will soon be no excuse for the United States not knowing exactly what they are like. What they will do about it then remains to be seen. Probably nothing. That is what nations mostly do about themselves: it is only each other's imperfections that move them to action. But, at least, they will not have the excuse familiar in the flurried later days of the Coalition. For it will hardly be open to the United States to plead for indulgence with the vexed enquiry, "Why wasn't I told?" They were indeed. A whole world unites to tell them. Few recent books (biographies alone excepted) refer to any other theme; and if America does not read them, it has only itself to blame.

I rather think it does though. The gigantic daughter of the West was always apt to pass long hours before the mirror. Dull-eyed visitors from Europe were invariably asked what they thought of the United States by eager journalistic enquirers, who always (unlike Pilate and Mr. Aldous Huxley) stayed for an

answer. The answer was not always given; and sometimes it was a little grudging, since jaded travellers from ancient continents often failed to sympathise with a young community's consuming interest in itself. But it was natural enough. And when old-world visitors failed to play up with suitable opinions on the dominant theme, the New World redressed the balance. For a whole school of American students of the American scene began to appear. Mr. Mencken touched the war-drum; and his unsympathetic brush was soon painting the American *Selbstporträt* in broad, unpleasing strokes. His sprightlier partner followed suit; and Mr. Nathan varied the humbler office of the dramatic critic with comminatory excursions into the national pulpit. These lively sounds fell on the dull ear of Europe; and presently a stream of old-world visitors began to oblige with variations on the same cherished theme. But just a shade politer. For the obligations of hospitality impose a mild restraint. A sort of literary Monroe Doctrine seemed to preclude the last degree of candour. But quite a number of exploring searchlights ranged promiscuously over the far-flung riddle of the dark American continent. Their movements were a shade re-

stricted, since the explorers never seemed to go anywhere except to places lying on the well-trodden route of lecture-tours. They hovered round New York and Boston, took a look at Chicago, and then plunged manfully into the much-lectured Middle West. They changed trains for Philadelphia, cast one awe-struck glance at Washington, and hurried off to catch their boats for home. But California rarely saw them (unless they peered for one delicious moment over the Kleig-lit rim of Hollywood); they knew nothing of Mexico, except as the place where Mr. D. H. Lawrence keeps his complexes; and, thanks to its meagre appetite for lectures, they never saw the South. Happy South, where Women's Clubs live lonely lives untroubled by stray English novelists and vagrant Arctic explorers complete with slides. For the South, in its remote security, appears to have attained all the advantages of Secession without its drawbacks.

One uniform defect marred almost all their observations. They seemed, if one might judge by their American impressions never to have seen anything elsewhere in all their lives. Presumably they all live somewhere. Conceivably they even travel in their vacations. But the

simplest object seen in the clear American light appears to leave them prostrate with admiration. A blast-furnace fills them with sombre awe of transatlantic enterprise; a girls' school kindles a glow of pleased anticipation of a new, unprecedented generation. You recall the gambit:

> "It was a windy afternoon at ——. After the lecture where long rows of eager faces had confronted me with all that was intellectually most alert in ——, a smooth-running automobile whirled us along unrivalled highways past the brightly lit boulevards to the Children's Nose, Throat and Ear Hospital. How wisely and gently this great community tends its ailing little ones. There, in exquisite surroundings, soft-footed nurses (every one a female) bring the latest aids of science to each happy bedside. Birds were singing in the trees beyond the open windows. Happy ——, I thought, where invalids are tended so. And how lively was the contrast with the roaring hive of industry down in the city there, behind the gasworks. Surely the future is to such communities as ——, where work, play, and illness are all provided for with civic foresight. . . ."

You know it, I repeat. Have you not read it scores of times in almost everyone's American impressions? But if you only substitute the

name of Wigan for Keokuk or Dubuque, how foolishly it reads. These wide-eyed travellers always behave as though the world outside the United States lived in tents and eked out a gipsy life by swapping strings of beads for cowries. They seem to have no standards. (I have always suspected that few novelists know anything about life; and their impressions of the United States go far to confirm the dark suspicion.)

But the perfect observer will not, one feels, be put upon by the simple fact that hotels are larger, trains heavier (and slower), and after-dinner speeches longer than at home. He should not maunder about democracy because a Czech waiter cheeks him or foresee an iridescent dawn for humanity in the lights of a cash-register factory working overtime. Hospitable obligations may insert just the tiniest mote in his observant eye. But the eye must be there, must even see that most elusive of Americans, the unemployed. For the United States dwell economically in a barbaric Paradise that records no national statistics of unemployment. Conjecture ranges free; but even Mr. Spender, least excitable of observers, estimates that "the number of unemployed in prosperous times was at least as great as in Great Britain, and might

easily with a slight dip in trade be much greater"—with the cheerful aggravation that there is nothing whatever in the nature of Unemployment Insurance. For the workless man is left to charity—or to drift on across the States to a Pilgrims' Chorus of "Go west, young man, go west," ingeminated by old gentlemen from the upper stories of skyscrapers.

But our novelists, I fear, will still continue to recall that windy afternoon at ——.

THE MODERN MAN

I

THE first and most favoured treatment of the theme opens with the statement (made in a hollow voice) that the man of to-day lost his illusions in the War. What his illusions were or why he had any before he went to France, we are rarely told. But one is left with a touching picture of smiling men toiling happily in the sunlit fields of 1913; fortified by an unswerving faith in the intelligence of their masters and the adequacy of their wages; believing equally in the high call of patriotism and the obligation to give up their seats in trams to ladies; composing music which really had a tune; writing poems that scanned; painting, when they were painters (and not infrequently when they were not), pictures of which the subjects were discoverable without prolonged reference to the catalogue.

The scene changes; and the same men come trooping back from war, without faith, without manners, without metre, without perspective,

with nothing beyond a hard-faced determination to get what they can out of life; since life, in four years, has got so much out of them.

The two pictures are extremely popular. They have all the lively charm of contrast, and they enable the artist to predict the worst upon whatever subject engages his particular interest. Proceeding from these simple premises, he can paint the future in gloomy monochrome—the future of art all black, the future of industry all grey, the future of politics all Red.

But some of us can still remember the world in 1913. A few even can use their eyes in the world to-day. And it is time that the fallacy that history began with the Great War was definitely checked. It may be natural to find excuses for ourselves. But the War is not a sound one. It affords no reason why young gentlemen who did not go there should paint out of drawing. It does not justify a modern poet in producing a cacophony of serrated prose and calling it verse. The fact that France was invaded fifteen years ago is really no reason why bad manners should prevail in London restaurants. We are (unfortunately) what we are; but the War did not make us so. Most of us, so far

as our years permitted, were just as unpleasant in the halcyon years of peace.

It is so temptingly simple for novelists to paint a facile picture of an emaciated, shell-shocked world, grasping at pleasure, fending for itself, remembering always the inferno through which a few hundred thousand of its members walked. The picture is so easy. But, then, easy pictures are so apt to be untrue.

II

The second method demands a wholly different treatment. In this the Modern Man, now tall and handsome, puts far behind him the painted gauds of pre-war frivolity, and, with eyes opened at last to the deep significance of things, gropes upward to the stars. Scornful of dancing, oblivious of the films, he thinks of little but the League of Nations. How the jigging figures of 1913 seem to dwindle beside his stern and thoughtful figure. Compared with him, Rodin's *Penseur* is almost light-minded. His mind is busy with world-betterment, with organised efficiency, and (blessed word) rationalisation. His thoughts are turned on the future, on garden cities and the Labour Party. He has

no time for racing, revues, and all the pre-war entanglements. He is, perhaps, a trifle bewildered; but his heart—oh, yes! his heart is in the right place. That, in our second view, is the Modern Man.

III

There is no such person as the Modern Man. It is to be hoped that there never will be.

A WORD WITH MR. ARLEN

CLOTHED with appropriate magnificence in cloth of gold, wreathed with gardenias, and dripping Dry Martinis from an inexhaustible cornucopia, Mr. Arlen comes (as he would love us to say of him) upon the town. He would appreciate the phrase, because he has a rather disarming tenderness for *Dix-huitième* affectation and because, unlike the unforgettable curate he *does* like London.

If there is any legal penalty for jactitation of urbanity, Mr. Arlen has surely incurred it —with bar. He and his characters are so horribly at ease in Zion. They irritate by a rather Babu familiarity with West End place-names. They take their walks down Jermyn Street with so keen, so delighted a consciousness of its being Jermyn Street, that one begins to suspect them of being up in London for the day. Theirs is the urge which Mr. Barnato knew, the irresistible *Drang nach Westen* which has so often propelled unsuitable persons steadily westward into houses along Park Lane. Was Mr. Kipling wrong? He dreamed that East was East and

West was West, and never the twain . . . Yet in Mr. Arlen's London East End and West End seem to blend at last in a single and harmonious whole.

At the first blush (and I confess that this is the first time I have blushed over Mr. Arlen) the soul faints at the really monstrous vulgarity of his *mise en scène*. He parades his "Persian apparatus" with a dreadful profusion—continuous cocktails, trap-drums that thud from dawn till dusk, a cloud of peeresses, vistas of footmen, butlers innumerable as the sands of the seashore, fountains that run old brandy. The soul, as I hinted, faints. Applying restoratives and fanning her gently, one exclaims, "Soul, be brave; remember what M. Anatole France said of your duty; and since you are bound on a voyage of criticism, continue your adventure among masterpieces—I shall be close at hand in case you come over queer again."

Superficially, Mr. Arlen is a lineal descendant of *The Family Herald;* his splendours, like those, hold the pantry spellbound; and his shingled beauties are just this season's version of the Lady Ermyntrude in her Gilded Boudoir. But is he more than that? He makes it difficult to say. There is a turn of wit and a

trickle of pleasantly extravagant conversation. But he often spoils his moments by a grimace behind the scenes; and his solemnities are of a hushed banality. When his young ladies are run over, "the lithe young body was broken and still"; stabbed in the street, they remind him of nothing so much as "a flower on a pavement in the rain."

Detached from their expensive draperies, these stories are neither conspicuously good or bad. One feels that the Muses have not yet visited Mr. Arlen, but only their sisters Worth and Callot—sometimes even their brother Clarkson. He seems to take some interest in writing; and one day, perhaps, when he forgets his dreadful duty to be smart, he may write. But until then, "Farewell," as he says, "These Charming People."

A Russian Fairy Tale

A RUSSIAN FAIRY TALE

DEDICATED
WITHOUT PERMISSION
TO
THOSE GALLANT TAXPAYERS
WHO
WILL HELP TO GUARANTEE
THE SOVIET LOAN

ONCE upon a time there was a poor Moujik who, feeling that he was not quite poor enough, destroyed his means of ever becoming any richer. He did this with the aid of great natural powers of destruction and an imperfect recollection of something that he had once read in a German book. When his task was completed, the Moujik began to feel extremely hungry. But since the textbook had directed him to destroy all accumulations, he had no means of satisfying his rising appetite. At this moment he was intensely gratified to observe the approach of a Good Fairy with a Celtic fringe.

"Ah! my friends," the Good Fairy began, more from force of habit than otherwise.

The Moujik, unable to repress a distant memory of the feudal system, bowed profoundly. This appeared to gratify the Good Fairy, who believed that all fairies were equal before the law, but held strongly that some fairies were more equal than others. But at that instant the Moujik, recollecting his principles, called the Good Fairy a number of bad names and said that he was hungry.

"Ah! my friends," the Good Fairy began again, preparing (as his practice was) to remind his hearer that his sufferings were due to the Capitalist System, under which he lived. But, fortunately, he remembered in time that the Moujik lived under a purer system and made no further reference to the subject.

"Your need," said the Good Fairy, "is for commodities."

"What penetration," exclaimed the Moujik, and very nearly bowed a second time. "But I have no money to buy them with. I did not believe in the utility of money until I began to feel so hungry."

"That," said the Good Fairy, "will be all right. You can borrow the money on reasonable terms from private capitalists."

At this word the Moujik uttered an angry

exclamation which the Good Fairy affected not to hear. He said it twice, and added, "I have shot them all."

"Oh no," said the Fairy, "there are several remaining in countries which still lie in the darkness of outworn economic shibboleths. I know one or two myself. They would no doubt advance the money on reasonable terms."

"But," said the Moujik, "I do not believe in paying back."

"Hush," said the Good Fairy.

There was a short pause for reflection, and the wind sighed drearily across the steppes. The Moujik, who was really feeling remarkably hungry, moaned a little and began to wish that he had not been quite such a good shot.

"What would you say," said the Fairy, "to a guarantee?"

"What's that?" enquired the Moujik.

"Of course," the Good Fairy cried, "you have forgotten the base devices of an exploded system. A guarantee is easy. The fairies would promise to pay back the capitalists in case you failed to do so."

A slow smile broke across the Moujik's face. "But are the fairies like that?" he asked.

"Not all of them," replied the Good Fairy,

"but some of them. Especially those who would not have to pay."

The Fairy and the Moujik smiled together.

"We might explain," the Fairy added, "that the fairies would secure the privilege of making all that you require. That would be good for them."

"Would it," the Moujik asked, "if I had the things they made?"

"Of course it would, stupid," the Good Fairy said, a little ruffled, "because they would be paid for making them."

"Yes," said the Moujik, "but if they promised to pay for them, the silly fairies would be paying themselves, and I should keep all the things."

"Hush," said the Fairy.

THE END

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